n° 92
April 1993

Human Rights

Refugees

UNHCR
United Nations
High Commissioner
for Refugees

C O N T

FOCUS

Human Rights
&
Refugees

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Refugees is published by the Public Information Service of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. The opinions expressed by contributing editors are not necessarily those of UNHCR. The designations used do not imply the expression of any opinion on the part of UNHCR concerning the legal status of a territory or of its authorities.

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English and French editions printed in Switzerland by Roto-Sadag SA, Geneva.
Circulation: 200,000 in English, French, German, Italian, Japanese and Spanish.

ISSN 0252-791 X

Cover Photo: Bosnia-Herzegovina.
PHOTO: © JUDAH PASSOW / NETWORK / LOOKAT

Human rights and humanitarian action go hand-in-hand

In recent years, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has assumed a new and greatly expanded role, one that was never a part of its formal mandate: assisting and protecting persons displaced within the borders of their own countries.

These are often people who are trapped in civil wars, internal strife, and ethnic conflict, and who have suffered and are suffering gross human rights violations. This new calling inevitably raises a host of questions for the agency. One of the most important is whether it can provide effective protection to persons in their countries of origin without assuming more of a role in monitoring and reporting on human rights conditions and coordinating efforts with U.N. human rights bodies.

Humanitarian organizations are often the first to learn about human rights abuses perpetrated against the people they are charged to assist. Take the example of the former Yugoslavia. In the spring and summer of 1992, humanitarian agencies and the U.N. Protection Forces (UNPROFOR) were among the first to learn that Muslims in Bosnia were being summarily executed and that detention camps had been set up in which Muslims and Croatians were being tortured and murdered. The information, however, was not sent to U.N. human rights bodies for action. Some of it was not even forwarded to UN headquarters in New York. What was sent reportedly languished in offices preoccupied with other questions; an official in the Department of Humanitarian Affairs commented that DHA doesn't have human rights within its mandate and in any event "no one had the time" to focus on it. When the press got hold of the story, humanitarian agencies, including UNHCR and UNPROFOR, came under heavy criticism for not communicating the information to those who could act on it and for not making it public.

Although one UNHCR official recently observed that "human rights is not our traditional business," this is fast changing and for good reason. It is increasingly recognized that for humanitarian action to be effective, it must be part of a larger and more integrated approach that includes attention to human rights protection. Steps are already being taken to require humanitarian organizations and

peacekeeping forces to report on human rights conditions to those in the U.N. system authorized to act on these issues. In September 1992, U.N. Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali issued a special directive authorizing UNPROFOR to communicate human rights information from the field. At its first emergency session held in August 1992 on the former Yugoslavia, the U.N. Commission on Human Rights requested all United Nations bodies and specialized agencies to furnish on a continuing basis human rights information on the former Yugoslavia to the Commission's Special Rapporteur. In October 1992, the U.N. Security Council specifically asked "international humanitarian organizations" to collate "substantiated information" on grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions in the former Yugoslavia and submit it to a Commission of Experts set up to investigate and identify cases for possible prosecution.

In the fall of 1992, a memorandum of understanding was concluded between UNHCR and the U.N. Center for Human Rights formalizing cooperation and information exchange on the former Yugoslavia. This is an important new step, one that is warmly endorsed by the High Commissioner and by the new director of the Center, Assistant Secretary-General Ibrahima Fall.

In addition to this formal agreement covering the former Yugoslavia, informal information exchanges have come into being between UNHCR and the Center on a number of other countries. Clearly, the days when the Center could obtain no information about the disappearance or abduction of refugees from UNHCR camps are now past.

Additional steps, however, are clearly needed. At the Ninth Nordic Seminar on Human Rights in January 1993, Nordic Institutes of Human Rights recommended that the Center and UNHCR should jointly operate a hu- ▶

man rights data base that would deal with all countries and serve the entire U.N. system. Specifically, they suggested that UNHCR's Center for Documentation on Refugees, which contains extensive public human rights information on many countries, should serve as the initial information base. Since the Center for Human Rights has no such capability, this idea merits serious consideration. Training should also be considered for UNHCR staff in human rights reporting.

Sadako Ogata is the first High Commissioner for Refugees to fully appreciate the need for stronger links between the refugee and human rights fields. At each of its annual sessions, she has urged the Commission on Human Rights to take a greater role in the protection of refugees and internally displaced persons. In 1992, a General Assembly resolution endorsed her efforts "to increase cooperation with the Commission on Human Rights and the Center for Human Rights".

One of the clear advantages of such cooperation is that human rights bodies, unlike their humanitarian counterparts, can regularly speak out and expose serious human rights violations committed against displaced persons. Exposure does not always bring violations to a halt, but it can trigger international action to limit or deter abuse. Examples are the Security Council decisions authorizing force on behalf of humanitarian assistance in Somalia, Iraq, and the former Yugoslavia, and the recent decision to establish a criminal court to prosecute persons who have committed war crimes and crimes against humanity in the former Yugoslavia. Exposure of the detention camps in the former Yugoslavia resulted in the Commission on Human Rights' first emergency session and the appointment of Tadeusz Mazowiecki, a former Polish prime minister, to investigate and issue public reports on the situation.

UNHCR has also issued public statements on the situation in the former Yugoslavia, but it has not been able to go as far as human rights bodies. It is understandably reluctant to jeopardize relief efforts, access, and the security of its staff. Its statements have often strained to be "evenhanded," emphasizing the abuses "on all sides," to the point where they sometimes fail to give an accurate portrayal of the situation. The Commission on Human Rights had made clear that while abuses can be found on all sides, Bosnian Serb leaders and the government of Serbia are "mainly responsible" for the policy of "ethnic cleansing" and the flagrant human rights violations perpetrated to carry it out.

Sadako Ogata is the first High Commissioner for Refugees to fully appreciate the need for stronger links between the refugee and human rights fields.

Increasingly, UNHCR is bringing human rights abuses of displaced persons to the attention of the authorities in the former Yugoslavia, in particular the forcible returns of Bosnians from Croatia. It reports that it is encouraging the establishment of legislation and practices to guarantee the rights of the displaced and of minorities in various regions. It has investigated cases of rape, counselled potential returnees, sought refuge for those fleeing their republics, and brought humanitarian relief and shelter to substantial numbers. But the U.N. Commission on Human Rights' Special Rapporteur has nevertheless underscored that UNPROFOR and UNHCR "are unable adequately to protect the affected population and in many circumstances are helpless to prevent violations of human rights." Mazowiecki has recommended an expansion of UNPROFOR's mandate to enable it to "react directly" to human rights violations, the creation of security zones within Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the stationing of human rights monitors in the field to work together with the other U.N. bodies "to respond meaningfully to the need for continued and systematic investigation of serious human rights violations."

In the fall of 1992, the Center for Human Rights for the first time dispatched monitors to the former Yugoslavia, but the number was small — three or four — and none is in Bosnia-Herzegovina. UNHCR officials have strongly endorsed the stationing of U.N. human rights monitors in the former Yugoslavia to collect information, provide protection, help deter abuse, and reinforce humanitarian efforts. Mrs. Ogata has called for "new approaches" to "ensure an effective international presence that brings together human rights observers, humanitarian organizations and peacekeeping forces." The UNHCR officer dealing with the former Yugoslavia, Wilbert van Hövell, describes "the lack of on-the-spot involvement of international human rights machinery" as one of the "major deficiencies in the Yugoslav situation."

U.N. human rights bodies also need to expand their role. Although the use of monitors has not traditionally been part of the work of U.N. human rights bodies, in recent years monitors have begun to be dispatched by the Security Council to different countries as part of peacekeeping arrangements, for example in El Salvador and Cambodia. Their recent deployment in the former Yugoslavia is a small but important step in the direction of giving an actual protection role in the field to U.N. human rights bodies. Monitors in ample numbers and with a strong mandate could prove an effective tool in many countries for increasing protection for those at risk. They are especially needed in Iraq, where UNHCR and other U.N. agencies have reduced their presence and the number of U.N. guards

protecting relief supplies has been cut at the insistance of the Iraqi government. The Commission on Human Rights' Special Rapporteur on Iraq, Max van der Stoel, has strongly recommended the stationing of human rights monitors in that country.

Protection for internally displaced persons could also be enhanced by strengthening and extending the mandate of the representative of the Secretary-General on internally displaced persons. Last year, at the request of the Commission, the Secretary-General designated Ambassador Francis Deng to prepare a study on the human rights dimension of internal displacement. It is expected that this year the Commission will authorize him to seek to improve protection for internally displaced persons by intensifying his dialogue with governments and working with UNHCR and other humanitarian agencies. Mrs. Ogata has endorsed the creation of "a monitoring and reporting mechanism on the internally displaced within the U.N. human rights machinery." When the Commission acts on this, as is anticipated, the U.N. Center for Human Rights will be called upon to provide the staff and support to enable the representative to carry out his work.

But the U.N. Center for Human Rights will have to be strengthened if it is to be able to assume additional protection responsibilities in collaboration with UNHCR. As Assistant Secretary-General Fall indicated in a recent interview with this writer, whether the Center can do its job in support of humanitarian efforts will depend on its capacity to secure more resources. At present, less than 1 percent of the U.N.'s regular budget is allocated to the organization's human rights programs, and the Center's budget is only about $9.5 million. More U.N. funding for the Center, and for other U.N. human rights activities, is an issue that this year's World Conference on Human Rights should surely address.

With UNHCR increasingly involved in country of origin situations, closer cooperation with human rights bodies has become essential to the establishment of a more effective international system — one that addresses both protection and assistance and provides increased security for internally displaced persons.

Roberta Cohen
Senior Adviser for Human Rights, Refugee Policy Group

Early warning, early action

An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. The old adage has never been truer than in the handling of human rights violations and the refugee outflows which they produce. Condemnations of abuses and programs of refugee protection are hollow substitutes for timely international action to prevent mass violations.

U.N. Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali stressed in his Agenda for Peace that an "early warning" capacity is an integral element in the development of preventive diplomacy. Early warning is not enough, however, without the political will and the institutional ability to respond effectively to such warnings.

Some of today's worst refugee crises might have been prevented had the will and the way existed to respond to clear warnings that massive human rights violations were occurring or were imminent.

The case of the Iraqi Kurds is perhaps the most blatant. In the Anfal campaign, Saddam Hussein used poison gas to lay waste to Kurdish villages in 1988. The international community knew all about it, and refused to act. At the 1989 meeting of the U.N. Commission on Human Rights, 15 Western countries, urged by human rights groups, introduced a resolution to condemn this and other atrocities. The Commission's Asian and Muslim states, however, joined those buying oil or selling weapons to Iraq to block the action.

The low priority accorded to Iraqi abuses by some Western countries also contributed to this failure. The United States, preoccupied at the Commission by its efforts to condemn Cuba, and France, which was arming Saddam, refused even to co-sponsor the resolution. Only after the Gulf War and the failed Kurdish rebellion produced a massive refugee outflow did the world move to protect the Kurds.

In the former Yugoslavia, the international community's failure to respond to Serbian violations in Kosovo may have allowed the authorities to believe that "ethnic cleansing" was an acceptable tool in building a greater Serbia. A 1991 Helsinki Watch mission reported that "Serbian authorities in Kosovo are responsible for the torture and killing of ethnic Albanians in detention." Nothing was done.

U.N. failures to react to information on atrocities in Cambodia, Somalia, and the Sudan also permitted these situations to get out of hand.

Even where the will to halt violations exists, the means must be present as well. Since 1948, the U.N.'s role in the protection of human rights has grown steadily. The Commission on Human Rights now annually reviews the records of gross violators. It also has standing task forces or rapporteurs on torture, political executions, disappearances, arbitrary detention and religious intolerance. U.N. committees review states parties' reports on compliance with treaties on civil and political rights, economic and social rights, the rights of the child, torture, racial discrimination and discrimination against women.

At the same time, the capacity of the U.N. to act in emergencies, its ability to respond to grave situations, is structurally and politically limited. In the past, the U.N. human rights system has relied mainly on the yearly meetings of the Commission on Human Rights which, when faced with gross violations, issues a strongly worded resolution and appoints a "rapporteur" to visit the country concerned and report back at the next session — 12 months later.

While this in itself represents progress from the not so distant times when such action would have been considered "interference" in the "domestic jurisdiction" of member states, its preventive effect is relatively minimal. In his 1992 report, Boutros-Ghali admitted that if the U.N. was responding adequately to normal situations, "the United Nations has not been able to act effectively to bring to an end massive human rights violations." He added that "the long-term credibility of our organization as a whole will depend upon the success of our response to this challenge."

Over the past year, the United Nations has made significant advances in dealing with violations of human rights. The Commission on Human Rights held two emergency sessions in 1992 on the former Yugoslavia and appointed a special rapporteur — former Polish Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki — who visited the territory. The U.N. Center for Human Rights undertook high-level missions to Georgia and Latvia in October 1992 to investigate crises there.

The idea of on-site monitoring as a way to prevent violations is also beginning to take root — though in a haphazard way. U.N. human rights officers have been deployed as part of peace-building operations in El Salvador (ONUSAL) and Cambodia (UNTAC). Their presence has discouraged violations, but they have no connection to the Commission or to the U.N. Center for Human Rights. Human rights groups accuse both operations of subordinating human rights concerns to higher political objectives.

U.N. and OAS monitors are taking up posts in Haiti to try to create the conditions for a political solution. The OAS monitors have no background in human rights, however, and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights has complained that it is shut out of the operation.

When UNTAC leaves Cambodia, the U.N. Center for Human Rights will take up an operational presence, but it is unclear whether its mandate is to assist the new government or to monitor abuses. The special rapporteur on the former Yugoslavia has been given the assistance of a team of on-site monitors, but his counterpart for Iraq has had a similar request turned down repeatedly. ▶

On-site monitoring clearly has the potential to be a more effective tool in preventing violations than the occasional visit by a rapporteur. In order for monitors to carry out their mission fully, whether as part of a peace-building operation or as delegated by the Commission on Human Rights, their mandate should be clearly set forth: they should have adequate training in human rights; they should be under the supervision of a special rapporteur, the U.N. Center for Human Rights or a High Commissioner for Human Rights rather than a chief of mission; they should apply internationally accepted human rights standards; and there should be a smooth transition to those who will be responsible for human rights protection after their on-site work.

As the promotion of human rights is a fundamental U.N. objective, each U.N. country mission should have one person responsible for collecting information on human rights and providing "early warning."

The tragic events in the former Yugoslavia, Kurdistan, and parts of the former Soviet Union have made clear that ethnic conflict is one of the major threats to peace and human rights in the post-cold war era. A strong regime for the protection of minorities will thus be an important prophylactic to prevent outbreaks of tension.

In July 1992, the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe established a High Commissioner on National Minorities "as an instrument of conflict prevention at the earliest stage." The rest of the world has no such mechanism. A "Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities" adopted by the General Assembly in December 1992 calls for positive action by states to protect minority rights, but provides no enforcement mechanism.

The clear need for leadership in the human rights area and a capacity to respond rapidly and effectively to early warnings has generated renewed interest in the long-standing proposal for a High Commissioner for Human Rights. The appointment of a U.N. Undersecretary General for Humanitarian Affairs has already created a sort of high commissioner for humanitarian affairs who can respond immediately to humanitarian emergencies, negotiate access to emergency areas, and coordinate the U.N.'s provision of emergency relief and assistance. There has been no equivalent strengthening of the U.N.'s capacity to respond to human rights emergencies.

In the run-up to the June 1993 World Conference on Human Rights, Amnesty International has championed the creation of what it would call a "Special Commissioner for Human Rights." According to Amnesty, the special commissioner, an independent high-level authority with a sole and specific human rights mandate, would be empowered to take initiatives and coordinate U.N. action in response to human rights concerns and emergencies without waiting for the yearly Commission meeting.

Unlike the Undersecretary for Human Rights in Geneva, whose principal task is running the Center for Human Rights, the proposed special commissioner would "wake up every day thinking: 'How can I protect human rights?'" said former Amnesty International Secretary-General Ian Martin. The special commissioner would intervene immediately where he or she learns that abuses are occurring or are imminent. And a special commissioner — if the right person were chosen — would not be hostage to the political considerations which often impede action by the Commission on Human Rights. Using his or her status, the special commissioner's intervention could take the form of dialogue with the authorities concerned and/or an investigation in *situ*. In exceptional cases, the special commissioner could develop an in-country monitoring program and dispatch on site-monitors.

Reed Brody
Executive Director
International Human Rights Law Group.

The Right to Remain

High Commissioner for Refugees Sadako Ogata recently addressed the issue of human rights and refugees in a statement to the Commission on Human Rights in Geneva. Following are excerpts from her 3 March statement.

❧

The issue of human rights and the problems of refugees are so inextricably linked that it is hardly possible to discuss one without referring to the other. Human rights violations are a major cause of refugee flows and also a major obstacle to the solution of refugee problems through voluntary repatriation.

More positively, safeguarding human rights is the best way to prevent conditions that force people to become refugees; respect for human rights is a key element in the protection of refugees in their country of asylum; and improved observance of human rights standards is often critical for the solution of refugee problems by enabling refugees to return safely home...

Like refugees, the internally displaced are in a very vulnerable situation. Like refugees, they need protection, assistance, and a solution to their plight. Although UNHCR does not have a general mandate for the internally displaced, the interrelationship between their situation and that of refugees has meant UNHCR is frequently called upon to assume responsibilities on their behalf, particularly in situations where the need for humanitarian assistance is coupled with a need for protection...

Frequently, the internally displaced cannot obtain effective protection from their own government, either because it has lost control of a part of its territory or because it perceives them as a threat and supports or condones violations of their rights. Since they have not left their country, the internally displaced do not qualify for international protection as refugees. Their protection needs must be met through the general provisions of human rights and humanitarian law, and through *ad hoc* operational arrangements. How to secure observance of the norms of human rights and humanitarian law for the internally displaced is one of the most important challenges facing the international community...

The prevention of refugee flows and of internal displacement requires protecting the right of people to remain in safety in their homes. There are unfortunately too many instances where human rights have been or are being deliberately violated with the aim of expelling whole groups of people from their homes and from their country. The former Yugoslavia provides a particularly graphic and painful example. There, UNHCR is providing assistance not only to refugees and the displaced, but also to people who are under a direct threat of expulsion either through military attack or through the form of persecution referred to as "ethnic cleansing." The atrocities that are the instruments of this policy include murder, torture, mutilation and rape. Despite all our efforts, they continue even now. And this unfortunately is only one example of the threats worldwide to the human right to remain.

In speaking of "the right to remain," I mean to underline the need to protect the basic right of the individual not to be forced into exile and to emphasize an aspect of human rights that deserves further development in connection with our efforts to address the causes of refugee flight. The right to remain is implicit in the right to leave one's country and to return there. In its simplest form it could be said to include the right to freedom of movement and residence within one's own country. It is inherent in Article 9 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that no one shall be subjected to arbitrary exile. It is linked also to other fundamental human rights because when people are forced to leave their homes, a whole range of other rights are threatened, including the right to life, liberty and security of the person, non-discrimination, the right not to be subjected to torture or degrading treatment, the right to privacy and family life.

If I, as the High Commissioner for Refugees, emphasize the right *not* to become a refugee, it is because I know that the international protection that UNHCR, in cooperation with countries of asylum, can offer to refugees is not an adequate substitute for the protection that they should have received from their own governments in their own countries. The generosity of asylum countries cannot fully replace the loss of a homeland or relieve the pain of exile. In this period of heightened tensions between various groups within countries and growing threats of conflicts whose primary aim is to force one group of people to leave territory shared with another, the question of how to enforce people's right to remain, to have their rights respected where they are, and not have to flee to find protection, has become urgent. I invite you to consider human rights situations from the standpoint of the right to remain because I am convinced that there will be no end to the plight of refugees until the international community has found ways to deal effectively with the root causes of forced displacement... ■

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Monitoring human rights around the world

The refugee question is first and foremost an issue of human rights. This fact becomes all the more important in light of the dramatic global increase in the number of refugees and the reluctance of so many states to abide by their international obligations toward refugees and asylum-seekers.

To many, this link will seem obvious. But Amnesty International has noticed a worrying trend in recent years : questions relating to refugees are addressed primarily in terms of immigration control, while the human rights issues are sidelined.

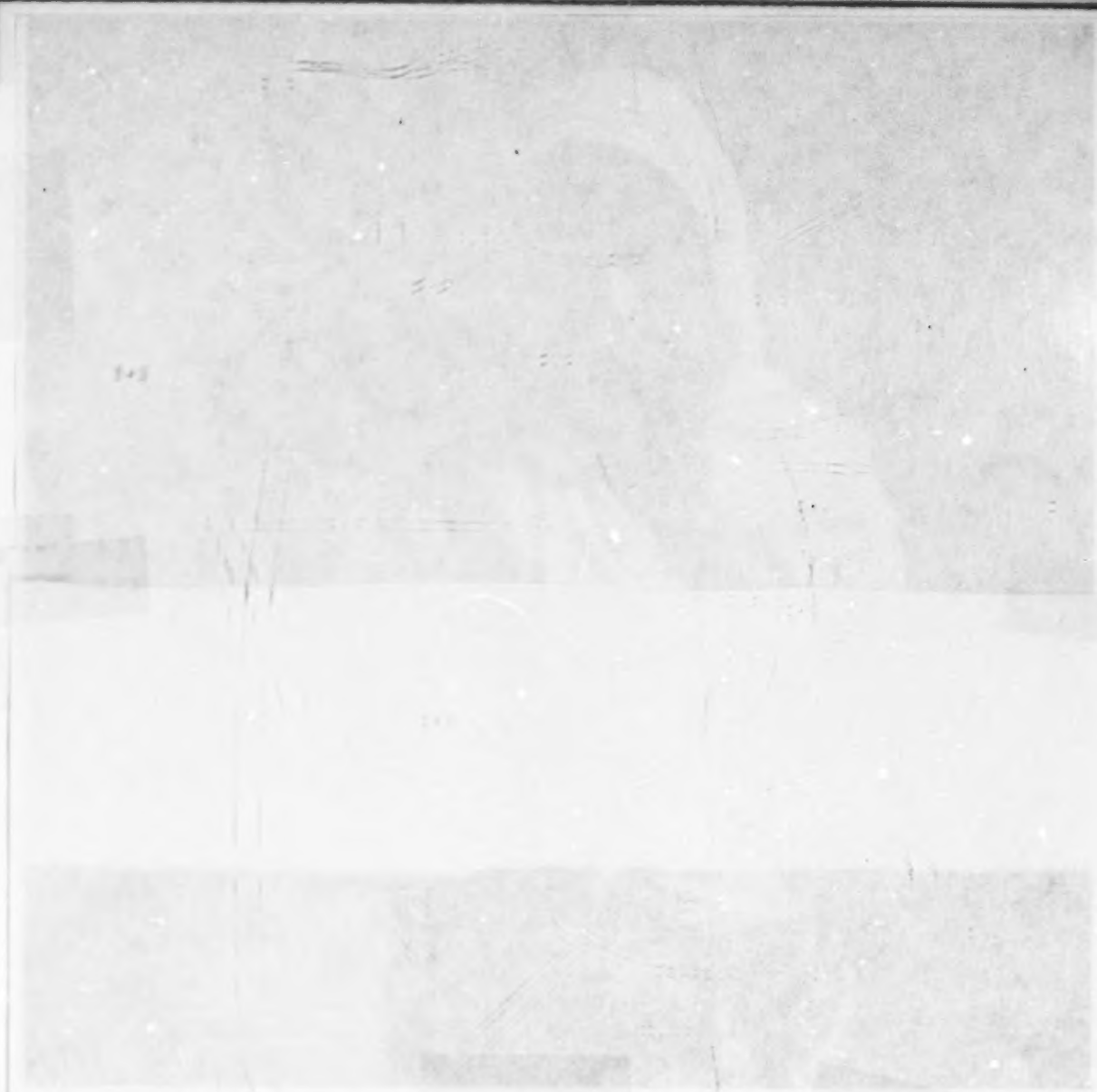
Amnesty International (A.I.) is a worldwide voluntary movement that works to prevent some of the gravest violations by governments of fundamental human rights. As part of its worldwide campaign for human rights, A.I. opposes the forcible return of anyone to a country where he or she risks serious human rights violations, and it works to ensure these people receive effective and durable protection in the countries to which they have fled. We are involved in this work because so many of the refugees and asylum-seekers who appeal to us for help, or whose cases come to our attention, recount stories that are all too familiar to us and which relate directly to actual country situations where human rights are being violated.

In the past few years, millions of people have been forced to abandon their homes, their land and often their families and friends to flee to other countries in search of protection. Some have witnessed the most appalling human rights atrocities and feared they would be next on the list. Others belong to religious, ethnic or other groups that have been singled out for persecution. Many have been individually targeted by their government because of their political activities or opposition to the government. Still others have escaped from civil war.

In Southeast Asia, more than a quarter of a million Burmese Muslims fled from Rakhine State in predominantly Buddhist Myanmar (Burma) to escape the brutal excesses of the military government, which intensified a ruthless persecution of the Muslims in September 1991. Hundreds were killed, fields and crops were confiscated, homes and mosques were destroyed and women were dragged off to army camps and raped, while men, women and children were tortured or ill-treated after being conscripted for porter service or other forced labor.

Myanmar and Bangladesh have signed an agreement for the repatriation of the refugees, but it contains inadequate safeguards to ensure that repatriation is voluntary and there is no evidence that the human rights situation in Myanmar has improved. In a letter sent in August 1992 to more than 20 governments worldwide, A.I. argued that it would not be safe to repatriate the refugees unless the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees monitors both the repatriation process and the refugees' situation after their return to Myanmar.

Only an effective international presence in Myanmar can ensure that the government will not resort to the brutal policies it pursued in the past against the Burmese Muslims, and which its current dismal human rights record



makes all the more likely to continue. In its letter, A.I. also called on the international community to help the government of Bangladesh provide protection to the Burmese Muslim refugees. While such international assistance is crucial, A.I. also called on the Bangladesh government to live up to its international obligations towards the refugees.

Also in Southeast Asia, many hundreds of refugees have fled to Malaysia from the Indonesian province of Aceh, where Indonesian government forces have committed serious and widespread human rights violations. An estimated 2,000 civilians, including children and the very elderly, have been unlawfully killed, sometimes in public executions; hundreds, possibly thousands of villagers have been arbitrarily arrested on the merest suspicion of supporting an armed secessionist movement. Many of those detained have been held incommunicado for long periods, and subjected to ill-treatment and torture. Although the level of such violations appears to have subsided in the past year, Amnesty International believes that it is still unsafe for the refugees who have fled to Malaysia to return to Aceh. The Malaysian authorities have proved unwilling to grant adequate protection to these people and A.I. remains concerned about their fate. ▶

In Haiti, the security forces and civilians acting in collusion with them have arbitrarily arrested thousands of Haitians since a military coup overthrew the democratically elected government in September 1991. Many people were tortured or murdered. An A.I. delegation to Haiti in March 1992 discovered that the security forces were using threats of arrest or torture to extort money from civilians, while rampant corruption of the judicial system and its connivance with the military made it impossible for Haitians to seek reparation in the courts.

In the face of such repression, tens of thousands of Haitians have fled the country seeking refuge in the United States, which has adamantly refused to honor its international obligations to protect refugees. Thousands have been intercepted in international waters by the U.S. Coast Guard. Nearly 40,000 were intercepted between November 1991 and May 1992 and taken to the U.S. naval base in Guantanamo, Cuba, where their applications for asylum were inadequately examined. More than 25,000, including many children who became separated from their families or friends, were transported back to Haiti. Many others have been returned directly to Haiti without even the most cursory attempt to identify those who might be at risk of human rights violations — a flagrant violation of international law. Repeated allegations of violations against returned asylum-seekers were made to A.I. delegates who in March 1992 attempted to interview returnees. A.I. found that many of them had fled into hiding for fear of reprisals.

The U.S. government's policy is currently being challenged before the U.S. Supreme Court. Amnesty International filed a brief to the court arguing that the policy is a blatant violation of international law, pointing to the continuing and widespread human rights violations in Haiti.

In Africa, the widespread human rights abuses which took place in the context of the civil war in Somalia led to the flight of over 300,000 refugees into Kenya, and thousands more fled by boat to Yemen. Other civil wars and human rights crises on the continent caused millions of people to flee their homes in Liberia, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, Sudan and elsewhere.

The horrendous human rights abuses being committed in the former Yugoslavia, particularly in Bosnia-Herzegovina, have led to hundreds of thousands of people seeking protection in neighboring countries and elsewhere in Europe.

In Europe, the horrendous human rights abuses being committed in the former Yugoslavia, particularly in Bosnia-Herzegovina, have led to hundreds of thousands of people seeking protection in neighboring countries and elsewhere in Europe. In a number of reports, A.I. has documented the arbitrary killings, arbitrary detention, torture and ill-treatment committed in the process of forcibly expelling thousands of Muslims from Serbian-controlled territory. The organization has documented human rights abuses committed by all sides in the conflict. Most recently, there are reports that following the military advance by Croatian forces against Serbian forces in the U.N. Protected Areas in January 1993, non-Croatian civilians have been deliberately and arbitrarily killed.

Amnesty International's research confirms that rape and sexual abuse of women in Bosnia-Herzegovina is widespread and in some instances has been carried out in an organized and systematic way. Some women have been detained for the specific purpose of being raped. Although all sides to the conflict have committed these abuses, the chief victims have been Muslim women and the main perpetrators members of the Serbian forces.

In the face of such abuses, governments must provide adequate protection for refugees fleeing the former Yugoslavia. Amnesty International has condemned the use of visa requirements by several European states which obstruct those in need of protection from gaining access to their territory. There are continuing reports that people fleeing Bosnia-Herzegovina, particularly Muslims, are being prevented from entering Croatia if they have insufficient documents. This is in violation of international standards which prohibit refoulement at the border even where there is a large-scale influx of refugees. However, A.I. believes that the Croatian authorities might be less inclined to violate these fundamental standards if other European states were not resorting to restrictive measures.

David Petrasek
Amnesty International

UNHCR's protection role continually evolving

Over the past four decades, UNHCR's traditional protection role has become much broader in scope and significantly more operational. At the same time, its focus of action is gradually shifting from protection in countries of asylum and refuge toward activities in countries of origin.

Refugee protection as a modern concept is founded in human rights. With their roots in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the 1951 Convention on the status of refugees and its 1967 Protocol provide a basic framework for the protection of refugees. They are complemented by a wide variety of other human rights norms. Explicit and implicit standards for the protection of refugees can be found in such diverse texts as regional human rights instruments, the Torture Convention, the Conventions on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and the Rights of the Child, not to mention the Geneva Conventions and their additional protocols.

The basic strengths of these texts is their focus on the individual who must be protected, whose status needs to be determined, whose rights are at stake, and whose problem needs solving. Any discussion of UNHCR's traditional protection role must, therefore, start by identifying who he or she is.

UNHCR's Statute declares that the High Commissioner will protect persons who have a well-founded fear of persecution, based on specific grounds. Secondly, the High Commissioner shall follow policy directives given him or her by the U.N. General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council.

There have over the years been a considerable number of such directives. Their common feature has been to request and authorize the High Commissioner to protect a wider category of persons who are compelled to leave their country for reasons of safety and security. This is not a question of the High Commissioner's mandate, but a statement of fact.

While UNHCR's Statute is explicit on the issues of who is to be protected and how, it is mute on the question of what is to be protected. But guidance can be found from some of UNHCR's sponsors, including Eleanor Roosevelt, who stated that "it would be the duty of the High Commissioner to intervene with governments in order that refugees might be afforded minimum rights and privileges essential to their existence and security." Subsequent UNHCR practice has confirmed this overriding objective.

That is not to say that there is a dearth of protection standards. In fact, in the early days of UNHCR's existence, most of its efforts were geared towards developing such standards. It participated in the drafting of the two universal refugee instruments which provide, still today, the most exhaustive rendering of refugee rights. Moreover, though often forgotten, they establish the principle that refugees have duties to the host country which require that they conform to its laws and regulations.

A substantial number of additional and complimentary standards for refugee protection have also been developed by states and UNHCR.

The role of UNHCR, to borrow from the language of the Statute, is to promote the conclusion and ratification of international instruments for the protection of refugees as well as special agreements with governments designed to improve the situation of refugees. Likewise, UNHCR shall assist in the promotion of voluntary repatriation and promote the admission of refugees to the territories of states.

The ultimate responsibility for protecting refugees on a day-to-day basis lies with states; it is on their territory that refugees find themselves (or to which they seek entry); it is their laws and regulations which set the immediate standards for protection; and it is their officials who are tasked with implementing them.

This means that UNHCR has an enduring interest in the development of national policies, laws and regulations, and in ensuring that governments establish strong and efficient institutions for their implementation.

But early on it was seen that protection often had to be provided without cooperation from states, which were either unable or unwilling to protect refugees. In fact, the main threat to the protection of refugees often emanated from states themselves. As a result, UNHCR had to assume an operational protection role. The ex- ▶

Early on it was seen that protection often had to be provided without cooperation from states.

▶ amples are multiple: Determining refugee status of individual applicants on behalf of states, or unilaterally; providing entry and arranging for sanctuary; developing and implementing refugee protection programs; providing physical security; establishing civil registers of refugees (including registering births, deaths and marriages).

Since protection relates to the safety and well-being of refugees, providing emergency assistance to keep refugees alive is also an eminent protection task. So is the running of feeding centers for infant refugees. There are even protection aspects in what would appear to be pure assistance activities. For example, while the establishment of camps may be important in order to ensure effective distribution of relief supplies, their physical location and design can have serious repercussions on the safety and well-being of refugees.

The focus of the international refugee protection regime is exile and integration. But this is not to say that protection cannot occur in countries of origin.

Although the return of refugees took place under international arrangement in the early 1920s and again after World War II, it was not until 1980 that the international community, faced with the soaring costs of refugee programs, began to re-focus on the issue of repatriation. That year, and again five years later, UNHCR's Executive Committee adopted recommendations which would formalize a protection function for UNHCR in countries of origin. In essence, it consists of monitoring the fulfillment of amnesties or other forms of guarantees that may have been offered to induce the return of the refugees.

Thus, over the last decade, UNHCR has gradually assumed a more systematic protection role in countries of origin. Teams have been set up in countries of origin which, in collaboration with national authorities and voluntary agencies, seek to ensure that effective protection is provided upon return and that no one is made to suffer retribution on account of previous political activities or for simply having sought asylum elsewhere. The practice has, however, by no means been uniform and much remains to be done to ensure impartial action and avoid the application of different standards in largely identical situations.

Welcome though it may be, extending UNHCR's protection function to countries of origin has paradoxically also introduced an element of instability in the international protection regime. Not only has "protection" been provided there to persons who were never refugees in the first place but, based on the dictum that prevention is better than cure, activities have also been directed at displaced persons in their countries of origin.

Among the multitude of questions to which this development has given rise, at least two deserve attention from a protection perspective. First, assistance to displaced persons in their own country, although necessary, does not amount to protection. Thus, the danger if such activities are viewed — which is increasingly the case — as a substitute to asylum in other countries. Second, these types of operations require separate authorizations which have the effect of severely diminishing the control which UNHCR can exercise. This should be a cause of major concern since independence (together with predictability) has so far been a main precondition for successful protection action.

More damaging, as the focus is shifting toward action in countries of origin, the image is gradually being created of a UNHCR which is selective in its approach to protection tasks and increasingly unable to carry them out successfully.

Are refugee rights currently being eroded? The answer is elusive. Recent events have fundamentally changed the context in which refugees are protected. The lessening in tensions between states has, however, not resulted in an improved protection climate. Quite the contrary. Numerous are the instances in which basic rights are violated, probably on a more massive scale than ever before. The focus appears no longer to be on inclusion (ensuring that those in need are identified and protected) but on exclusion. Refugees, individually and collectively, are returned against their will; others cannot obtain asylum or access to procedures for seeking protection; still others are denied the very basis of survival and many suffer direct physical violence, often in the most outrageous forms.

Assistance to displaced persons in their own country, although necessary, does not amount to protection.

Much has been said about the meaning of refugee protection. Whether legal, consular or political, practice over the years has shown that it is an eminently practical activity; seeking to ensure through all available means that refugees are afforded minimum rights essential to their existence and security. Protection relates to the very fundamentals of life.

Which is not to say that refugee protection laws and principles are unimportant. On the contrary, laws and regulations, principles and guidelines, are nothing but the manifestation of past practice and policy. Their development does not precede action; it follows. They represent the cumulative experience of the international community. A major challenge to refugee protection and those involved in its implementation is simply their willingness and ability to draw on that experience.

Anders B. Johnsson

Helping torture victims become survivors

Programs to assist refugees who have suffered from torture and other gross human rights violations have been set up in many countries in recent years.

Amnesty International initiated the effort in 1973 when it appealed to the medical profession to participate in the campaign against torture. The Rehabilitation and Research Center for Torture Victims (RCT) was established in Copenhagen, Denmark, nine years later and its work has since spread to many countries. Treatment principles, teaching and research activities, as well as documentation services, have gained global recognition.

To date, RCT researchers in Copenhagen have examined torture survivors from 47 countries. RCT and its international branch, the International Rehabilitation Council for Torture (IRCT) Victims, have a staff of 80 people and the largest library in the world on torture and the treatment of survivors.

The Danish group began its work from scratch. There had been no systematic medical studies on how widespread torture was, or on its long-term physical and psychological effects.

The first torture survivors examined were Chilean refugees living in Denmark, and Greeks. The objective was to find forensic medical evidence about the aftereffects of torture. What was discovered, however, surprised the researchers: the most damaging ▶

▶ results of torture were psychological. That was surprise No. 1: Torture was not only unbearable, perverse and disgusting while being administered, but it continued to haunt survivors for many years.

Later, the researchers came to another surprising conclusion: The ultimate aim of torture was not to obtain information, but to break down the victim's personality and human identity.

Why is that? The question begged further analysis and led to surprise No. 3: The targets of the torturers' destructive work were the so-called "strong personalities," people who had the courage and strength to fight repressive regimes. These people are clearly identifiable: union members, human rights advocates, student leaders, politicians, journalists, and representatives of ethnic minorities.

Studies through the years brought up a fourth important discovery: Torture survivors can be helped. The torturers were wrong when they told their victims that they would be destroyed for the rest of their lives. The dirty work could be redressed and remedied.

Torturers today are able to create conditions which, at least temporarily, break down the victim's personality and identity, as well as his or her ability to live a full life with other people. The worst consequences are psychological. Deep feelings of guilt and shame often occur after torture. For some, this guilt may be caused by the mere fact of survival when one's friends have died under torture. For others, it may be a result of being forced to divulge information that could have harmed friends.

Psychological studies reveal that survivors can show a variety of symptoms, including anxiety, memory gaps, depression, low self-esteem, a feeling of changed personality, frequent nightmares, and difficulty in remembering and concentrating. Fatigue, headaches and sexual disturbances are also common.

The psychological aftermath of torture can be the same among survivors, but its physical effects depend on the methods used. For example, *falanga* (beating the soles of the feet) impairs walking; suspension by the arms causes shoulder pain.

Rehabilitation work has developed very quickly since the late 1970s. Since its establishment as an independent, humanitarian and non-political organization in 1982, RCT's main objectives have been to rehabilitate torture victims and their families; to instruct Danish health professionals in the examination and treatment of brutalized people; and to conduct research into the nature, extent and consequences of mistreatment.

> The ultimate aim of torture is not to obtain information, but to break down the victim's personality and identity.

The immense interest in RCT led to the formation in 1988 of the IRCT. Its objectives are to support research into all aspects of torture, the establishment and maintenance of rehabilitation centers, the education and training of health professionals on the medical, social, legal and ethical aspects of the problem and to serve as an international clearing house for information about torture.

The two organizations' 80 employees include doctors, nurses, psychologists, social workers, physical therapists, interpreters, administrative personnel and librarians.

Five areas are addressed in the treatment of torture survivors: psychological, somatic, social, legal and spiritual. Signs of severe dysfunction in the individual may be reflected in any of these five areas, thus requiring special attention.

Rehabilitation at RCT is based on the following principles:

- The physical and psychological symptoms must be treated at the same time;
- Respect for the individual;
- Securing the patient's trust and confidence;
- Avoiding situations which remind the patient of interrogation or torture, like a long wait;
- Carefully informing the patient about special medical examinations or treatments — ECG, EEG or surgery — before these procedures are carried out;
- Professional confidentiality must be strictly kept during and after treatment.

The model of psychotherapy for torture survivors developed at RCT borrows valuable concepts from the treatment of concentration camp survivors and from modern crisis intervention therapy. It is based on the assumption that relief follows when a survivor is able to confront and work through the traumatic experiences. Emotions are thus relived and abreacted, or brought to consciousness, and subsequently reintegrated as events of the past.

There are five phases of insight therapy for torture survivors.

- The meeting. During this phase, which may last several sessions, trust and confidence are consolidated. As the story is recollected, the therapist explains how signs and symptoms from the body and the mind may be related to the memory of the torture. Patients are told that names and addresses are not important for the therapeutic process and may be left out or substituted at will. In contrast, the emotions attached to the specific circumstances are necessary to the therapy process.
- Initial setting. The survivor starts to recollect life before torture and gradually moves on to the day of arrest, or he or she may prefer to start directly with the most traumatic event, which may be causing trauma.
- Emotive phase. As the survivor

recollects scenes from the torture, the presence of repressed emotions becomes clear. These repressed emotions are addressed in a non-chronological fashion, often starting with a major trauma. As survivors become able to attach emotions to their memories, more and more repressed emotions are released.

- Reintegration. As the memories are repeatedly recalled, the survivors gradually begin to understand their ordeal in a new light. They realize that what happened to their mind was foreseeable, and that their reactions were those of a normal human being. The emotional swings during recollection of the trauma and its circumstances lessen as memories are relived several times, and eventually the survivors are able to refer to details of their torture without experiencing emotional upheaval.
- End of therapy. Gradually the survivors are able to function again. When this happens, therapy sessions gradually end. The average number of sessions is 30, depending on a number of factors. These include resistance to reliving experiences, the motivation to follow the treatment model, the severity of the symptomatology, the ability of the survivor to verbalize, and the complexity of the case, including particularly the presence of concomitant somatic or social factors.

Some survivors undergoing therapy are unable to gain insight into their psychological reactions, or insight therapy may be contraindicated. Under such circumstances, they may get supportive therapy.

Other important issues in supportive therapy are social, such as housing, language training and education. Sessions may also be used to develop a basic understanding of the new country of residence.

A combination of alternative therapies is frequently used. In some cases family, art, group, or play therapy is used.

Over the years, RCT has developed a worldwide information and education service. Teaching materials for doctors, nurses, psychologists, psychotherapists and other health workers have been developed. In 1992, the organization had 124 teaching and information sessions in Denmark and 155 abroad. These activities are in accordance with Article 10 of United Nations Convention against Torture of 1984.

The International Documentation Center at RCT/IRCT, established in 1987, has the world's largest collection of scientific literature - articles, books, slides and video films - on torture and the treatment of survivors. An important element in our education service is the establishment of satellite documentation centers. Sharing of experience and information among the different documentation centers overseas is valuable in the work against torture.

RCT's main research programs focus on:

- The effect and development of psychotherapeutical rehabilitation;
- Symptoms, behavior and rehabilitation of children from families subjected to torture or with disappeared family members;
- Assessment of torture sequels; and
- Documentation of participation of medical personnel in torture.

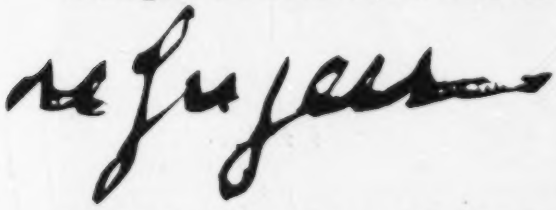
Frank Ochberg, an American doctor, has written the following poem which shows deep knowledge and insight into the suffering of the torture victim. It could sum up the aim of RCT's rehabilitation program:

"I have been victimized.
I was in a fight
that was not a fair fight.
I did not ask for the fight. I lost.
There is no shame in losing
such fight, only in winning.
I have reached the stage
of survivor and am no longer
a slave of victim status.
I look back with sadness rather
than hate.
I look forward with hope rather
than despair.
I may never forget,
but I need not constantly
remember.
I was a victim.
I am a survivor."

Soren Bojholm
Svend Bitsch Christensen
Inge Genefke
International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Survivors, Copenhagen

Bhutanese

Several hundred Bhutanese began fleeing to Nepal in early 1991 after crossing malaria-infested jungles in India. The number of arrivals has reached more than 78,000. The refugees say they were persecuted and forced from their



homes by Bhutanese authorities. The Bhutan government denies the allegation and says those who fled were illegal migrants.

Bhutan says measures to curb illegal migration were prompted by fears that if unchecked, it may result in the Bhutanese people becoming a minority in their own country.

ALL PHOTOS: UNHCR / A. HOLLMANN

ARMENIA & AZERBAIJAN

Another winter of discontent

Like a tiny caged bird, 11-year-old Karineh Ghioshghian breaks into song, momentarily forgetting the cramped confines of her family's one-room refugee flat in the frozen Armenian capital of Yerevan.

As an icy wind whips across the snow-covered rooftops outside their third-floor window, Karineh's relatives and neighbors — all of them Armenian refugees from the Shahumian District of Azerbaijan — listen intently to her song lamenting the loss of home, happiness and the simple pleasures of small-town life.

"In our village, there is no more love, there are no more weddings," Karinah sings. "Everyone has left. There is no more happiness there."

Soon, nearly everyone in the room is crying at Karineh's sad song, including her 70-year-old grandmother, Hranoush Sahatelian.

"How can we possibly contain our tears when we're reminded how someone came to our home and told us it's no longer ours?" said Mrs. Sahatelian, who with Karineh and four other family members fled fighting in Shahumian in June 1992. "We had to leave our homes and came to a place where we have lost all of our respect. Now, we must stretch out our hands and beg for everything. Once, we had good neighbors and a good life. Now, we are all fighting for God knows what."

Mrs. Sahatelian's bitterness is shared by hundreds of thousands of other refugees and displaced people on both sides of the five-year-old war between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the disputed enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh. The conflict, one of several along the chaotic southern fringes of the former Soviet Union, reflects the long-simmering nationalist and ethnic tensions that have finally boiled over with the collapse of communism.

But for Mrs. Sahatelian and many of the more than 790,000 other refugees and displaced persons in both Armenia and Azerbaijan, nationalistic fervor has brought nothing but pain and misery. Lacking food, power, water and other basic necessities, most are now totally consumed with the desperate struggle to survive one of the bitterest winters in years.

"We don't have any future, just surviving is our future," said Mrs. Lovsik Goulian, a 72-year-old widow now living in a former prison that has been converted to a refugee center on the outskirts of Yerevan.

"We think we are a forgotten people," said Nazli Ilyasova, a 33-year-old Azerbaijani who with her husband and four children lives in a primitive earthen shelter in a refugee settlement on the outskirts of Agdjabedi, Azerbaijan. "Neither the Azerbaijani people nor the Armenian people want war. It's the politicians who are playing games and the poor people on both sides end up suffering."

In both republics, the war has drained government coffers and brought economic ruin, particularly in Armenia where a *de facto* blockade has largely cut the country off from the outside world and shut down most industry. And while both governments have done their best to help growing refugee and displaced populations, both have acknowledged that they need outside help.

In response to government requests, the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees sent two five-person emergency teams to Armenia and Azerbaijan in early December to set up offices in both republics. The offices, in Yerevan and the Azerbaijani capital of Baku, represent the first emergency assistance to refugees and displaced people provided by UNHCR in the former Soviet Union. Under an appeal coordinated by the U.N. Department of Humanitarian Affairs, UNHCR works closely with UNICEF and the World Food Program, as well as the International Committee of the Red Cross and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. ▶

On a bitterly cold February day, hundreds of people flock to Yerevan's parks to cut trees for firewood. "I don't like doing this," said one woman. "But what shall I do? Let my children freeze?"

PHOTO: UNHCR / R. REDMOND

Initially, the six-month, $6.4 million emergency operation for Armenia and Azerbaijan focused on helping 145,500 of the estimated 790,000 refugees and displaced persons in the two republics get through the winter. The beneficiary figure has since been increased to more than 200,000, and UNHCR now expects to remain working in both republics at least through the end of this year. UNHCR has so far transported from Turkey 185,000 blankets, which are being distributed to some 92,500 people in Armenia and 53,000 in Azerbaijan. Plastic sheeting and stoves have also been distributed. In addition, UNHCR is providing at least 2,000 metric tons of food for Armenia, will construct 300 homes for refugees and displaced people in Azerbaijan, and will assist in the repair of community buildings in both republics.

Armenia has absorbed at least 330,000 refugees since 1988, or about 10 percent of its entire population. Azerbaijan is host to about 460,000 refugees and displaced persons.

"We do our best to make the refugees and displaced happy, but because of economic difficulties we cannot afford much," said Ibrahim A. Hajjiyev, head of the Azerbaijan Foreign Ministry's Department of Cultural and Humanitarian Affairs in Baku. Hajjiyev said Azerbaijanis treated the displaced and refugees as "one of us."

An example of that generosity is a school for displaced children in the northwestern Azerbaijan city of Ganja. There, some 1,250 Azerbaijanis who fled their village near the Nagorno-Karabakh city of Stepanakert in December 1991 have set up a school on the ground floor of their communal quarters. All 17 teachers and 120 students are from the same village school in Nagorno-Karabakh. Each class has been "adopted" by an existing Ganja school, which has provided desks, books and clothes to the children.

Armenians also are doing what they can for the displaced and refugees, but are having a much tougher time of it. Most analysts agree that if the conflict continues into next winter the international community could be faced with a major humanitarian disaster in Armenia, where the few remaining supplies are being used up this year.

"Next year, if this continues, the general public could be worse off than the refugees, who will at least have a network set up for assistance," said Binod Sijapati, UNHCR program officer in Yerevan. "If no substantial change takes place before next winter, it's going to be a disaster."

Ashot S. Sarkissian, president of the Armenian Red Cross Society, agreed.

"Today, it is becoming more difficult to distinguish between people in need," said Sarkissian, whose organization works closely with UNHCR in the distribution of relief supplies to refugees. "The refugees are in the most extreme situation, but today 80 percent of the population of Armenia face almost the same circumstances."

Sarkissian and other relief officials worry that if things get much worse, the general population will require the same assistance as refugees. And if they don't get that assistance, there could be a backlash against the refugees and the aid organizations trying to take care of them.

Food prices in Armenia have skyrocketed in the past year, and bread queues are growing longer by the day. Yerevan and other Armenian cities are without electricity, gas, water and other services most of the time. In February, the capital's 1.5 million residents had power only one or two hours a day, forcing hundreds of thousands of people living in apartment buildings to use crude wood or kerosene heaters — if they were able to get the fuel. Temperatures can plunge to minus 20 or 30 degrees Centigrade — so cold that UNHCR drivers use cheap vodka in their vehicle windscreen washers to keep them from freezing.

Thousands of the city's beautiful old trees have been cut for firewood, and the streets are full of people dragging sleds loaded down with branches and logs. At night, the entire city is blacked out, with only a few candles or lanterns visible in the huge apartment blocks spread across the capital.

In northern cities ravaged by the 1988 Armenian earthquake, the situation is even more desperate. Hundreds of new buildings stand half completed, construction brought to a halt by the war and lack of power, materials and labor. Thousands of people still live in ramshackle huts hurriedly built after the earthquake.

"Only my wife and I remain in this world," said 80-year-old Alivendov Sbirasian. "I just want to die, but I want to die in my own land."

PHOTO: UNHCR / R. REDMOND

"If you add the 500,000 people who lost their homes in the earthquake to the 330,000 refugees in Armenia, about 30 percent of our total population is homeless," said Vladimir Movsissian, head of the State Department for Refugees, which with the Red Cross is UNHCR's other major local partner in the Armenian relief effort.

The department's deputy head, Rouben Barseghian, said the government is receiving numerous reports of cold-related deaths. In early February, for example, some 30 refugees trying to walk to a village near the earthquake-devastated city of Spitak froze to death in a snowstorm, Barseghian said.

"We are now seeing the mortality rate beginning to climb," he said. "There are many cold-related deaths. Some morgues say there are so many cadavers being brought in that we can't take care of them all."

Especially hard hit are children and the elderly, many of whom suffer from respiratory illnesses. Barseghian also cited reports of several deaths by asphyxiation due to poor ventilation and improperly fitted stoves in apartments.

"Since October, the national economy has been at a standstill," he said. "There is no power, no electricity, no gas, no nothing... You can put your finger on any administrative district of the map, and we have had demands for fuel from them that we cannot meet."

By next winter, if the situation remains unchanged, "only the most fit will be able to stay and survive," he said.

Sarkissian, the Red Cross president, said that in the early days of the conflict the government had expected refugees to get back on their feet in a relatively short time. But with the almost total economic collapse, such hopes have been dashed.

"The general situation in Armenia is now disastrous," he said. "Now the refugees just have to sit and wait for someone to give them bread. It is really horrible."

But even bread is a problem. At a former Yerevan music school now housing hundreds of refugees, 58-year-old Iskra Arakelian says her four grandsons — pale, thin boys with dark rings around their eyes — are unable to get even the 250 grams of bread they are allotted each day. One of the boys had fainted a day earlier in the hallway of the hostel.

"My husband was out all day yesterday queuing for bread and he's doing so again today," said Mrs. Arakelian, who shares a cramped refugee flat with seven other members of her family. "Today, I have not even a slice of bread to put on the table for the boys... We live like pigs, not human beings."

> "There are many cold-related deaths. Some morgues say there are so many cadavers being brought in that we can't take care of them all."

Some 250 kilometers east of Yerevan, in the Azerbaijani town of Agdjabedi, similar complaints can be heard from hundreds of displaced people forced to flee their homes in the Lachin region of Azerbaijan in May 1992.

"In Lachin, even our animals live in better conditions," said Shukur Ahmedov, a 53-year-old Azerbaijani refugee and father of nine children. "It is like we are caught between the sky and the earth. It is a terrible life."

School teacher Umud Mamedov, 35, said many of the displaced Azerbaijanis suffered psychological problems after seeing their homes destroyed by Armenian troops and their relatives and neighbors killed.

"During our escape, we stood in the hills and saw our homes and our city burning," Mamedov said. "There was no reason to stay there... Some people now have psychological problems. Some people killed themselves after seeing their houses burned. Some others had heart attacks.

"If we cannot return home, we will just wait for death," he added. "This is not a fit place to live."

Nazim Hasanov, a young surgeon at the Agdjabedi Hospital, said fighting within 12 kilometers of the town threatened to send a whole new wave of displaced into the area.

"If more refugees and wounded come here, we won't be able to cope," said Hasanov, who noted that just a week earlier the hospital was flooded with 52 wounded over a two-hour period. "For this whole area we have only one hospital. It is a very difficult situation."

Outside the hospital, an elderly displaced woman and her 35-year-old, mentally traumatized granddaughter squat beneath a tree in hopes that hospital personnel will give them a few scraps of food. They are there every day.

Nearby, 80-year-old Alivendov Shiraslan tells how he and his 70-year-old wife saw their two children killed and are now totally dependent on others for survival.

"Only my wife and I remain in this world," he said. "We live in a garage. People give us blankets, dishes and food. I just want to die, but I want to die in my own land."

Behind him, a middle-aged nurse begins to sob.

"Every day, I see innocent people in terrible condition," said the nurse, Rosa Aleskerova, who has worked at the hospital for 24 years. "I'm depressed. I don't have the strength to help everyone who comes to the hospital, but I must try. I try every day to help the refugees and the wounded, but it is so terrible to see, day after day."

RON REDMOND

Tajik refugee influx aggravates Afghanistan's woes

Two men living 15,000 kilometers apart volunteered to go to Afghanistan to help repatriate the world's largest single refugee population. Little did they know they would be sidetracked by one of the world's latest refugee emergencies.

Terry Pitzner, an American teacher of disabled children in Boston, was told he would be working with Afghans streaming home to a country in ruins from neighboring Iran and Pakistan after 14 years of exile.

From the other side of the globe, retired Sri Lankan air force commander Rajah Wickremesinghe headed to northern Afghanistan to assist war-weary Kabul residents who were flocking to villages and towns that were already in desperate need of adequate shelter, clean water and essential services.

Both men knew that the threat of a winter emergency loomed over Afghanistan, but that donor nations were turning their backs on repeated U.N. appeals for urgent funding.

"There are no rules here. You don't have an infrastructure in Afghanistan. Every local military commander is a government unto himself."

They searched for news about Afghanistan but were disappointed. The Cold War battlefield which had produced the world's largest number of refugees from one country — up to 6 million people — was no longer of strategic interest. Afghanistan was no longer making headlines.

With these difficult circumstances in mind, relief workers in Afghanistan like Pitzner and Wickremesinghe braced themselves for a bleak winter.

But winter would not be their first problem.

A crisis virtually unnoticed by the outside world was brewing to the north of Afghanistan.

Fighting in the former Soviet Central Asian republic of Tajikistan had driven hundreds of thousands of men, women and children from their farms, homes and villages. Months of civil unrest had fueled centuries-old, clan-

Tens of thousands of Tajik refugees braved the icy waters of the Amu Darya river to reach safety in Afghanistan.
PHOTO: UNHCR / A. JAMA

based rivalries in the power vacuum created by the break up of the Soviet Union.

"Our village was attacked, our cows were stolen and our homes were looted and burned," said Mohammad Rabi, a 51-year-old accountant who fled Jarqurgan in eastern Tajikistan with his extended family last November.

Sonya Hussein, a 42-year-old mother of 10 who lost her husband and son in flight, wept every time she spoke of her home in Sharatuz province.

"There had been a lot of talk about fighting, but in the beginning we didn't know what it was all about. Then we saw the helicopters in the sky and knew that the fighting was spreading," Hussein said.

Hussein and Rabi are among an estimated 350,000 Tajiks displaced by fighting.

Many refugees escaped with not much more than the clothes they were wearing.

With nowhere to go, Rabi said: "We built crude tents out of sticks, twigs, cellophane, whatever we could find, on an open field near the river on the Tajik side. We had very little food.

"Then the shooting started. We were chased across the river."

The fighting had pushed the internally displaced Tajiks to the southern provinces of their country bordering Afghanistan. More than 30,000 refugees dodged bullets as they crossed the frigid waters of the Amu Darya river on rafts made of oil drums and wood in search of safety. That was the first week of December. A second wave of 20,000 followed several weeks later.

Many lost family members during the treacherous crossing of the river forming the border with Afghanistan. The refugees who had survived massacres and witnessed other atrocities of war watched helplessly as their children died of cold and disease during flight.

The treeless desert plains of northern Afghanistan, where the icy winds from the snow-capped Hindu Kush howl relentlessly, had become their temporary home.

The first phase of the emergency concentrated on the speedy delivery of urgently needed assistance to the new arrivals stranded on the barren riverbanks just inside Afghanistan. Most of the new arrivals were without adequate clothing and many suffered from gunshot wounds.

"A lot of coordination was necessary with the local Afghan military in the initial stages of the emergency," said Wickremesinghe, who helped ferry food and medical supplies to the refugees and worked around the clock to have the first camp set up for the initial arrivals on December 26, 1992.

Moving them to safety away from the border proved to be a much bigger challenge.

Only a third of the more than 50,000 Tajiks had been transferred to refugee camps by early February. The rest were scattered throughout the northeastern corner of Afghanistan in homes abandoned during the Afghan civil war. They jammed schools, public buildings, factories and even an airport, competing with villagers, townspeople and returnees for food, firewood, water and other basic goods and services.

"To respond to an emergency, to set up a camp in a country like Afghanistan deprived of resources after 14 years of war, is not an easy job," said Roger Vivarie, a senior official working with the emergency operation for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

The general state of lawlessness proved also to be a major stumbling block for refugee workers handling the Tajik emergency.

The Tajik refugee influx aggravated tensions among Afghan militia leaders engaged in a bitter power struggle. Each faction wanted to keep the refugees in areas under its control to add to its power base. And each hoped to reap the benefits of a U.N. presence, including greater international assistance for rebuilding.

"There are no rules here. You don't have an infrastructure in Afghanistan. Every local military commander is a government unto himself," said veteran refugee relief worker Mohammad Arif, who had been dispatched from Pakistan to help with the initial stages of the UNHCR operation in the highly volatile border area.

Arif was charged with finding shel- ▶

Tajik refugees with little more than the clothes on their backs await transfer to camps in Afghanistan.
PHOTO: UNHCR / A. JAMA

Relatives grieve the loss of a Tajik refugee child who died of measles in northern Afghanistan.
PHOTO: UNHCR / M. OKABE

ter and providing assistance to some 15,000 refugees in Imam Sahib, where for three days in January Tajik tanks roared across the border to chase out Afghan infiltrators.

"We need to take the refugees away from this very tense area," Arif said.

UNHCR wants to move to safety some 4,300 refugees living in canvas tents inside an old textile factory, and nearly 10,000 others scattered around Imam Sahib, along with 12,000 more in nearby Kunduz, also beset by fierce militia rivalries.

But tensions along the border, fighting in Imam Sahib, two attacks on a food convoy bringing assistance to Kunduz, and an overall deterioration of security, including the prevention of refugee movements by local militias, have halted plans to build a refugee camp in the area.

For the moment, the only secure place for the new arrivals is Sakhi camp, 25 kilometers east of Mazar-i-Sharif, the center for UNHCR operations in northern Afghanistan. The colony of blue tents in the dusty desert camp can hold up to 20,000 people.

The refugees at Sakhi may be sheltered from harassment, but life is no less difficult. Keeping warm and clean is a monumental undertaking when all you have is a flimsy tent to guard against temperatures that plunge to minus 20 overnight and there are no trees for firewood as far as the eye can see.

A cemetery with 65 graves, mostly of young children, in the corner of the camp is a testament to their suffering.

As is the case in most of the refugee hot spots around the world, the outflow of people from one country to another is a sign of how bad things have gotten at home.

Months of warfare in Tajikistan, the poorest and least developed of the former Soviet republics, have displaced an estimated 10 percent of its population and cut off an entire eastern mountainous region in the severely cold winter. Food and fuel are in very short supply.

"The potential for larger scale displacements and their far-reaching social, economic and political consequences for regional and international security cannot be overstated," warned High Commissioner for Refugees Sadako Ogata early this year.

Describing the situation in Tajikistan as "critical," Ogata gave the green light for UNHCR to send an emergency team to the Tajik capital of Dushanbe as part of a coordinated U.N. effort in the war-ravaged republic to assist the most vulnerable groups inside Tajikistan and negotiate the earliest possible repatriation for the refugees in northern Afghanistan.

But until guarantees for their repatriation can be negotiated, the Tajik refugees are dependent on the goodwill of the Afghan people and assistance provided by UNHCR, other U.N. agencies and implementing partners.

Pitzner, the American relief worker from Boston, will continue to sneak off to the town bazaar to buy warm boots for the children who still have no shoes. His Norwegian colleague, Jimmy Bjerkansmou, will be making detours to pick up sacks of hard candy on his way to the camp to give to the children who have nothing to play with. And another, Parycher Sabety, will continue to meet with the women and listen to the needs of the most vulnerable.

The United Nations has launched a $20 million appeal for emergency humanitarian assistance to Tajikistan during the first five months of 1993. Another $3 million is needed to fund the refugee crisis in Afghanistan.

"What we need in addition to material assistance for the refugees is diplomatic action to facilitate their return home in safety and dignity and to prevent further refugee outflows to neighboring countries," said Kamal Morjane, director of UNHCR's Bureau for South West Asia, North Africa and the Middle East.

"The United Nations should contribute to the stability of Tajikistan and the newly independent states in the region," said Morjane, whose bureau oversees UNHCR activities in the Central Asian republics. "The only way to achieve this is through joint action by all U.N. departments — political, humanitarian and peace keeping."

But ultimately, it is only the communities inside Tajikistan themselves that can implement peace. They can if the will to find solutions is there.

MARIE OKABE

Tajiks co-exist with Afghan returnees

The Afghan village of Ismail Khel is a quiet and peaceful if poverty-stricken location without access to clean water, electricity or any other amenity.

It is also home, for the time being, to several hundred Tajik refugee families who have settled in unoccupied houses made of dried mud and straw bricks arranged in neat, spacious compounds.

In the same village are Afghans recently returned home after 11 or 12 years as refugees in Pakistan.

Abdul was an electrician on a collective farm in southern Tajikistan. But there is no electricity in Ismail Khel, and no money for them to buy kerosene for their one lamp.

His mother, Zeinurab, 70, says she has been ill for days and unable to sleep properly. She rubs her stomach in pain as she sits up from her quilted mattress on the floor.

The family's diet is limited to rice and a few vegetables, and the water should be boiled before drinking. Firewood, their only means of cooking, is scarce and has to be brought from far away.

> "We don't have much, but we're certainly glad to be able to help the Tajiks..."

The two sets of "newcomers" make an interesting contrast.

The Afghan returnees, receiving no assistance at all, are simply happy to be back home where there is now peace. The Tajiks, uprooted and traumatized in the last few months by civil war in their country, do receive some assistance and also feel cut off from the rest of their community who are living in a more organized refugee camp.

Useless to explain to the Tajiks that their new temporary homes, leaky roofs and all, nevertheless provide better shelter than the tented dug-outs at Sakhi camp, 50 kilometers away, where 14,000 other Tajik refugees stay.

In the village, Abdul Samat, 41, his pregnant wife and five surviving children live in two large, connected rooms. The floors are covered with carpets and rugs they brought with them from Tajikistan.

Looking at a large kitten they managed to bring with them, Zeinurab cries silently, remembering the home they had to leave behind in Tajikistan when they were attacked.

"There we had all we needed," she murmured. "Yogurt, butter, vegetables, meat. Here we depend on help from others. Rice we are given. Vegetables we can buy, 10 to 12 kilograms every week for the eight of us, if we can afford it, by selling off our carpets and quilts."

Her beautiful granddaughter, Nazira, aged 10, smiles as the kitten curls up to sleep. She misses her school, her friends and her Tajik-language books written in the Russian Cyrillic alphabet — the only alphabet most Tajiks, who are highly literate, know apart from some who read the Koran in Arabic.

Meanwhile, in a similar compound nearby, Amir Mohammed and his brother Nur returned a month ago with their families after 11 years as refugees in Pakistan's Baluchistan province. They had originally left Afghanistan because of the Soviet invasion. Another brother spent 11 years in jail under the communists.

They are extremely happy to be back and are staying with relatives until they can re-build their own houses after the winter. Much of the village was destroyed in the long Afghan civil war. On their land they have already planted wheat — the first harvest is due in July. Their family also owns a small shop in the nearby town of Tashqurghan, but business is slow.

In Pakistan they got their food rations, children went to school and health care was available. Back in Afghanistan there is nothing like that. The drinking water from the river is not clean and they always boil it. In Pakistan, water pumps provided clean water. "Here, you can see we need water wells, pumps and tractors," Amir said. So does all Afghanistan.

And what do they think of the Tajik refugees next door?

"We sympathize with them because they too are fleeing communism," Amir said. "We don't have much but we're certainly glad to be able to help them out in whatever way we can."

The mid-January sunshine is no match for the chilly north wind outside. For the Afghans, the future food supply lies in the land they till, but they have to wait for the harvest to mature.

Meanwhile, who is cultivating the cotton fields abandoned by the uprooted Tajiks?

HUGH HUDSON

Thousands of people lined the road to welcome home returning Guatemalan refugees. The 900-kilometer journey from the Mexican transit center of Comitan to the Ixcan region of northern Guatemala marked the start of a voluntary repatriation for some 45,000 refugees.

PHOTO: UNHCR / S.GIRARD

Journey to Ixcan

The buses were draped with large white banners expressing the hopes of Guatemalan refugees going home from 10 years of exile in Mexico.

"The road to peace begins with a dignified and organized return," said one huge streamer as the colorful convoy carrying the first 2,400 returnees crossed the border at La Mesilla on January 20. "The corn man returns to rebuild his country," proclaimed another.

On hand to welcome the motorcade of 70 buses were thousands of flag-waving Guatemalans led by 1992 Nobel Peace Prize winner Rigoberta Menchú. A Maya Quiche Indian, Menchú is a former refugee whose entire family was killed during the civil war in her country in the 1980s.

"I spoke to many people who told me they were looking for members of their family who had disappeared," Menchú later said at a reception center in Huehuetenango. "There was one

beautiful scene I witnessed. One old man who was waiting there was able to meet his five grandchildren, all born in the refugee camps, for the first time. I was very moved."

The 900-kilometer journey from the Mexican transit center of Comitan to the refugees' homes in the Ixcan region in northern Guatemala marked the start of a voluntary repatriation program for some 45,000 refugees living in camps in the Mexican states of Chiapas, Quintana Roo and Campeche.

U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees Sadako Ogata hailed the operation as a "giant step towards resolving refugee problems in Central America."

But it was not an easy process. It began with the Conference on Central American Refugees, or CIREFCA, in May 1989. The 50-nation conference adopted a plan to help some 2 million people who had been been displaced or had fled abroad to escape armed conflicts in El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua.

In Guatemala alone, the 30-year-old civil strife had caused the displacement of 1 million people and the death of an estimated 50,000 to 100,000 civilians, most of them Indians of Mayan descent.

Under a repatriation agreement between the Guatemalan government and refugee leaders, facilitated by a mediating group that included UNHCR among its members, some 15,000 of the 45,000 recognized refugees are expected to return home this year.

The initial operation had been delayed after refugee leaders had insisted on taking a circuitous route home via the Pan-American highway, including a stop in Guatemala City, to dramatize their return.

Normally, the trip from the Mexican border to Ixcan by the most direct route takes two days. But as one refugee leader put it, "We didn't want to enter our own country through the back door like thieves. We wanted Guatemalans to see for themselves that, contrary to rumors, we were peaceful civilians."

The convoy, which was organized by UNHCR and accompanied by international observers, representatives of religious groups and journalists, set out from Huehuetenango, in northeastern Guatemala, at 6:30 a.m. on January 23 for Guatemala City, 266 kilometers away. Along the route, thousands of welcomers showered the returnees with gifts — money, food, kitchen utensils and sacks of corn.

Lines of cars were blocked by the police to allow the convoy to get through. The motorists didn't show any anger at being kept waiting. On the contrary, they honked and cheered and waved white handkerchiefs. Many of them shouted to the UNHCR vehicles: "Thank you for what you have done for our people! May God bless you!"

> One old man who was waiting at the border was able to meet his five grandchildren, all born in refugee camps, for the first time.

On several occasions, the convoy had to stop altogether so that the returnees could participate in welcoming ceremonies organized by church groups, mayors and grass-root organizations.

The convoy finally arrived in Guatemala City at 10 p.m., after a 15-hour trip from Huehuetenango. The journey usually takes about five hours.

Once in the city, the convoy broke up into three groups, each going to a different school that had been set up to receive them. At an elite Catholic school, the exhausted returnees appeared bewildered as they were greeted by cheering youths waving banners and shouting victory slogans at the top of their lungs.

The returnees spent the night in a huge gym. The floor had been entirely covered with layers of newspapers and plastic sheeting to soften it up. Social workers carried sleepy children in their arms, as well as old women too weak to walk. As they led the families into the gym, they kept gently repeating: "Your troubles are over. Now you will be able to rest all night."

The following morning, a group of returnees marched some 15 blocks from the city center to the main plaza in front of the cathedral, where thousands had gathered. Many had spent the night there. All day and the following night there were ceremonies, masses and speeches. Rigoberta Menchú addressed the crowd, choking back tears of joy and excitement.

The last leg of the journey, a 400-kilometer stretch back to the Mexican border, was done in small convoys over a period of 12 days. At one point, where the road was most difficult, over 1,000 returnees were airlifted. Most of them were sick, elderly or women with small children. At other points, the jungle road was so muddy with recent rains that returnees had to abandon the trucks and walk a few kilometers while the children and their belongings were transported in pick-up trucks.

Polígono 14, chosen by the returnees as their final destination, is an undeveloped agricultural region close to the conflict area and near the Mexican border. The only infrastructure are some large sheds and a few latrines. But what worries the refugees most is the availability of farm land.

Said Juan Coq, one of the refugee ▶

▶ leaders: "We know the land in Polígono 14 can only sustain some 200 families, and 90 families are already living there. But the number of people who are now going back are over 500 families. We're really worried because we have nothing to plant, nowhere to live. We're going to have to build our little houses and start working hard in order to be self- sufficient in a year or two. We hope UNHCR will help us through that first year at least."

UNHCR is concerned that the returnees chose to bring more people than the land will sustain, and has advocated that future groups assure that their final destination offers enough land for everyone. Marcos Morales Sales, 30, and his wife Carmen Caan Caan, 26, are returnees from Chiapas. They also are worried. Marcos was 20 when he fled to Mexico, his wife was 16.

"Life in Chiapas was very difficult," said Marcos. "We had to keep changing settlements all the time in search of work. When we did find work with Mexican landowners, the pay was dirt cheap: 3,000 pesos a day (less than $1). And even then, we could only work three months a year, during the coffee harvest."

Marcos said the food the refugees received was never enough. "We're going back to Guatemala because there is no life for us in Mexico. We're especially worried about our four children. The eldest is seven. We want them to study and learn a job and we want them to be brought up in our culture. Right now they speak like Mexicans."

He added: "You know, the reason we came back with this first organized group is because we were afraid to go on our own. In a large organized return, there are many witnesses if something happens to you, but if you're alone, you're like a scrawny little chicken taken away by the hawk."

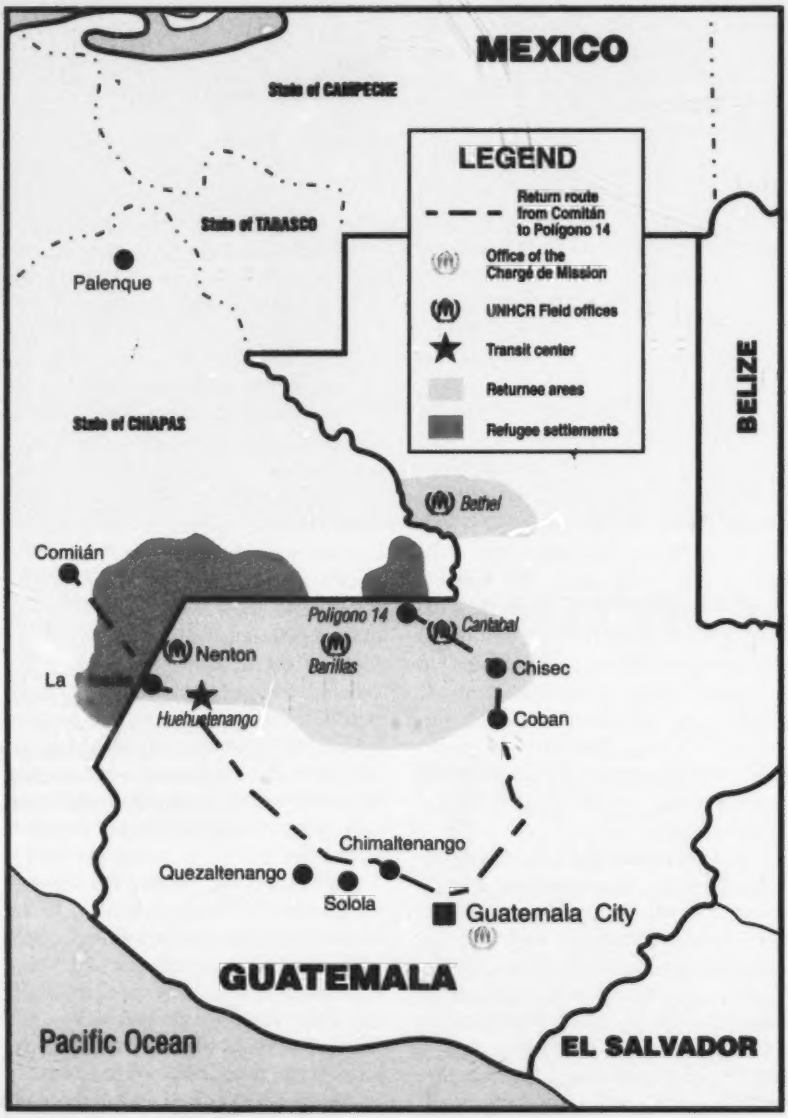
Asked whether he had any land title, he answered: "Yes, my father has it, but we really don't know whether that will be enough to get our land back. We know someone else is occupying it. We don't hold a grudge against him, though, because he's just a poor peasant like us trying to survive. It's up to the government to find a solution for both him and us. We don't want to go back to Guatemala to fight with our brothers who are occupying our land."

The repatriation was fraught with endless negotiations at every turn. Said Andres Ramirez, UNHCR field worker in Chiapas: "It was very difficult to program on the basis of constantly changing scenarios, but what helped us plan in the right direction is the fact that we had learned to know the refugees and their leaders so well..."

But the hardest part is yet to come. Although UNHCR will initially provide the returnees with a nine-month supply of food from the World Food Program and many NGOs have begun small projects, the land issue will be a tricky one.

Ultimately, the security of the returnees in Ixcan will hinge on the difficult negotiation process that has now started between the government and the guerrilla leadership.

SYLVIE GIRARD



A Question of Identity

The United Nations has declared 1993 the International Year for the World's Indigenous People — estimated at 200 million — to focus attention on the most neglected and vulnerable groups. Rigoberta Menchú Tum, 1992 Nobel Peace Prize winner, has been named UN Goodwill Ambassador for the Year of Indigenous People. A Guatemalan Mayan Indian and former refugee, Menchú spoke to *Refugees* during a recent visit to UNHCR headquarters in Geneva.

Q: *What does the International Year of the Indigenous People mean to you? What do you expect it to achieve? What are the problems of indigenous people in general and of Guatemalan Indians in particular? What solutions do you propose?*

A: In essence, I believe that the subject of indigenous peoples is a question of identity. It concerns the need for coexistence among peoples of different cultural expressions, the need to take on the fight against racism and discrimination, and awareness of the fact that indigenous peoples and women are the sectors most vulnerable to marginalization. I remain hopeful that the Year of Indigenous People will be transmuted into a struggle that will go beyond 1993. We should start dreaming of a better future for indigenous people by the year 2000.

Q: *What kinds of things — values, culture — can indigenous people contribute to the rest of the world? What can we learn from indigenous peoples?*

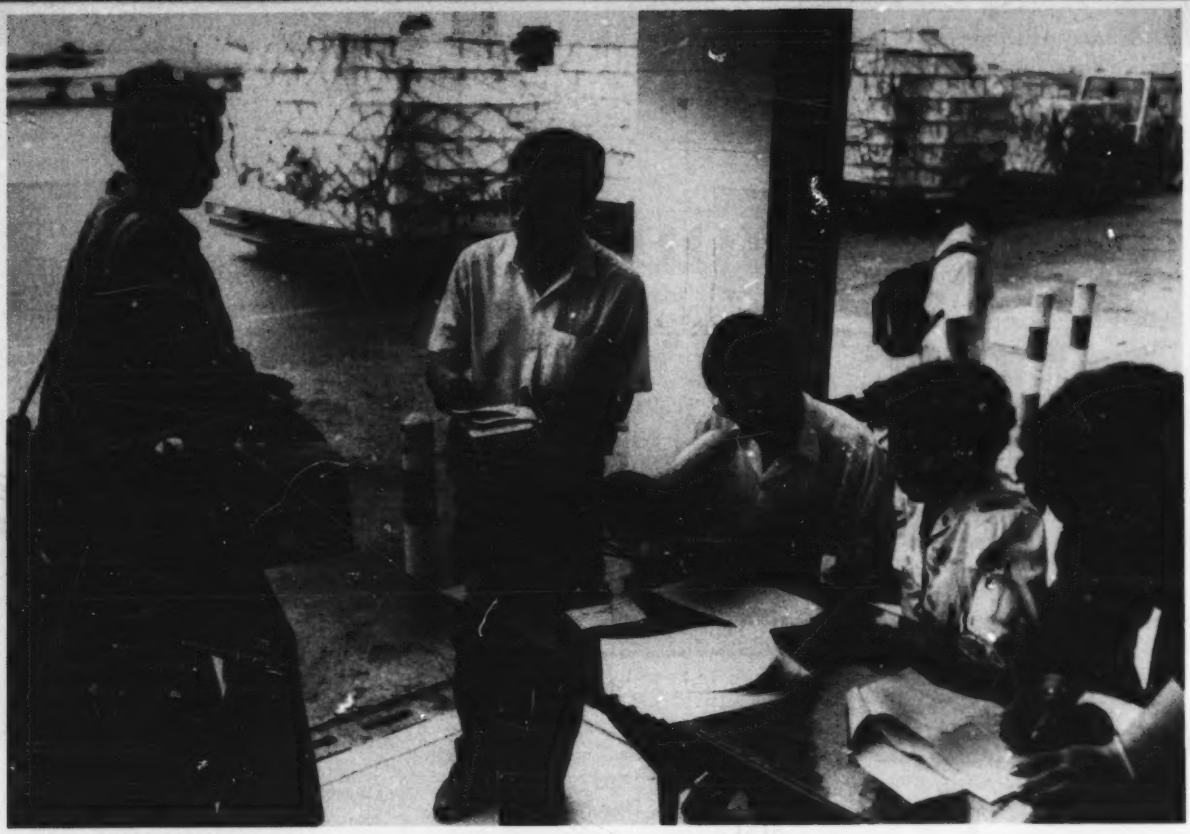
A: The advances made in America in science, technology, the economy and the building of cities have not been achieved without our people, as workers or artists. They have always had an influence. I am not the sort of person who romanticizes the indigenous peoples as a myth from the past, still less do I romanticize them among the ruins. Rather, I wish to emphasize that America has a pluralist culture and if this plurality is not accepted — if instead intolerance, imposition, exclusion and the alleged superiority of one race prevails — then undoubtedly there will be wars in the continent.

Q: *You say quite rightly that indigenous culture cannot remain fixed in the past, in the ruins. How do you see the interconnection between the two cultures? How can there be a dynamic interaction and what can it contribute?*

A: Many aspects of community life could be taken as a basis for the future. When I spoke in the Third Committee of the United Nations General Assembly, much of my statement was devoted to defending the concept of community. Some people think it is an obstacle to development, but the returnee community in Guatemala has taken on new life and shown that it is not an obstacle.

Q: *You mentioned the year 2000. What changes do you think will have taken place by then?*

A: I believe development has bypassed most of the social, cooperative and regional organizations. Many things will have to become more democratic and move forward. The task is daunting. But one should not be pessimistic. There is a need for a new art, a new song, a new music, new organizations. I'm not saying we should abolish everything; simply that we should learn to integrate new experiences. ■



Papers of Vietnamese returnees are checked on arrival in Ho Chi Minh City.
PHOTO: UNHCR / P. HERZIG

Vietnamese returnees find new hope in the future

From a squalid refugee camp, Le Minh Duc watched helplessly as his dream of a better life in Canada faded with each passing day. Finally, unable to ignore the truth, he decided to go home.

"I lived in the Malaysia camp for three years, it was very boring," said Le, a 36-year-old former office worker, one day after he stepped off a UNHCR voluntary repatriation flight to Ho Chi Minh City.

He said he realized at the Pulau Bidong camp that no country would give him a new home — a hope he had nurtured since he left Viet Nam by boat in March 1989. He also missed his wife and a son born shortly after his departure.

Video tapes shown in the camp indicated a potential for rapid economic growth in Viet Nam, Le said. Equipped with English he learned at Pulao Bidong, he said he knew he would easily get a good job and begin a new life in his homeland.

The day Le arrived, Tan Son Nhut airport was crowded with tourists and businessmen. Among them were former Vietnamese refugees who had become U.S. citizens. Their very presence demonstrated that political conditions had changed dramatically in Viet Nam.

The international community had perceived the transformation in the late 1980s amid warnings of "compassion fatigue" among first-asylum governments and resettlement countries.

In 1988, Hong Kong introduced refugee status determination procedures for new Vietnamese arrivals. Other first asylum countries subsequently followed Hong Kong's lead. The international community incorporated this policy in a Comprehensive Plan of Action (CPA) in 1989 in order

to resolve the boat people problem.

Since then, Vietnamese arriving in first-asylum camps have to prove that they have "a well-founded fear of persecution" to be able to resettle in third countries. The CPA included measures to stop clandestine departures, to promote an orderly departure program in Viet Nam and to facilitate the return of those found to be non-refugees.

The exodus from Viet Nam began after the fall of the South Vietnamese government in 1975. Many fled in leaky boats, braving storms and pirates prowling the South China Sea. Thousands died in the escape. Over the years, nearly 700,000 boat people have been resettled, mainly in the West.

But the continued outflow burdened first-asylum countries. The boat people were coming in faster than they could be resettled. By the late 1980s, most of the arrivals came from northern Viet Nam and were found to have left to escape poverty in their country.

The mass exodus went on through 1991, when more than 20,000 arrived in Hong Kong. Over 90,000 Vietnamese, including some 12,000 determined to be refugees, were still scattered in camps in Asia early this year. More than 45,000 people cram Hong Kong's camps, where congestion in prison-like facilities has sparked riots. During the 1992 Lunar New Year holiday, 22 Vietnamese died at the Shek Kong detention center in rioting and a fire sparked by fighting between rival gangs.

Recent developments indicate that the Vietnamese influx is coming to a halt. In 1992, only 12 Vietnamese arrived in Hong Kong and 43 in other countries. More than 36,000 people have returned to Viet Nam under UNHCR's voluntary repatriation program. The rate of returns has steadily risen and now averages more than 1,500 per month.

To further discourage departures from Viet Nam, a $410 re-integration allowance for people volunteering to return was dropped for Vietnamese arriving in first-asylum camps after September 1991. It was found that the money — slightly more than the average annual salary of a government employee — was encouraging people to leave Viet Nam a second time following their repatriation. This practice is known as "double-backing."

Without such incentives and with no resettlement possibilities in the West for non-refugees, many Vietnamese no longer find it worthwhile to risk their lives to find their dreams in distant lands.

For those who have returned, there are ample opportunities to start a new life. Skills training and development projects are provided under programs by UNHCR and its NGO partners using funds raised from countries supporting the CPA. These programs are centered in districts where there are large concentrations of returnees and are also designed to remove social tensions.

> "We want the returnees to be successful, but we are not obligated to make their dreams happen. They have to do it on their own..."

The European Community has a $130 million re-integration program available to Vietnamese, including the returnees. "We don't want to create a special class of people. We try to spread the benefits of our program," said Philippe Chau, regional director of the European Community International Program. "We want the returnees to be successful, but we are not obligated to make their dreams happen. They have to do it on their own. You realize they are not insulated from the problems of society, from cynicism, from unemployment."

In recent years, Viet Nam has made significant efforts to breathe life into its flagging economy, encouraging foreign investment, easing travel requirements and improving business infrastructure. In the meantime, life in the nation of 68 million people generally remains difficult.

Nguyen Thi Thein Huong, who heads the office of the Ministry of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs in Ho Chi Minh City, said returnees "must understand the country has a lot of difficulties. They have to accept the situation of Viet Nam."

UNHCR monitors the progress of the returnees. In their visits to returnee homes, UNHCR staff sometimes receive complaints, usually on delayed payment of repatriation assistance or local officials asking a cut from returnees' money.

The few claims of political harassment have not been substantiated. "Journalists regularly come here looking for that kind of story but have not found any," said Imran Riza, head of the UNHCR Working Group in Ho Chi Minh City.

One allegation of persecution was made in the November 1991 issue of Duong Song, a Vietnamese-language magazine in the United States. In an article titled, "The Promise of Wolves," the widely circulated publication said a 25-year-old returnee was arrested without charge after he voluntarily returned to Viet Nam on June 24, 1991, from Indonesia. The magazine severely criticized UNHCR, saying returnees had been assured they would not be persecuted.

The UNHCR office in Ho Chi Minh City investigated the case. Last June, the office located the returnee's mother, who denied her son was imprisoned. The woman said she wrote another son in an asylum camp in Indonesia and made up the story that his brother had been arrested to discourage him from returning.

The returnee himself appeared a month later at the UNHCR office. He said he was taken for questioning by police five or six times three months after his return in connection with a government investigation into clan- ▶

destine departures by boat people. But he said he was not arrested.

Militant groups active among asylum seekers are closely watching the implementation of the CPA. Despite initial skepticism, the plan has been generally welcomed and it is conceded that voluntary repatriation offers the best alternative for those who have been screened out of the resettlement process.

The adoption of special procedures for unaccompanied minors under the CPA had run into stiff opposition from militant organizations, causing delays. But concerned groups have called on UNHCR to take immediate measures to ease the plight of the minors, saying a generation of children has been traumatized in camps that are no more than ghettoes of crime and violence.

More than 2,000 unaccompanied minors have returned voluntarily. Tran Thanh Hung, 17, one of the recent returnees, is now studying to become a mechanic at a vocational training center. Like many of the young returnees, he now feels too old to go back to school.

Tran left Viet Nam with his friends on April 2, 1989, ending up in Indonesia. He said he wanted to have "a good time" and possibly go to a third country. He went through special procedures for unaccompanied minors, but he said he knew beforehand that he would not get resettled. On July 9, 1992, even before his case could be resolved, Tran decided to go home. He said he was happy being back with his family and was optimistic that the future would be kind to him.

The EC International Program office in Ho Chi Minh City has a long list of returnees who have taken out loans under its credit program and are doing well. Le Long Tien, 22, who voluntarily returned to Viet Nam in December 1990 after spending six months in a refugee camp in Malaysia, is one example. He runs a thriving noodle restaurant with his family, a business he built on $410 he received from UNHCR and a $200 loan from the European Community. After repaying his loan, he borrowed another $200 to further expand into the catering business. "Life is more stable now," he said.

There are many others who have not done as well, but who seem content being home with their families. Life in Viet Nam is not paradise but neither is life in other poor countries, said one relief worker. Those going back are making a fresh start.

"It is better to be poor but alive emotionally, rather than be relatively well fed and not knowing what the future will be in the camps," said Minh Nguyen-thi-Phuoc, a UNHCR associate repatriation officer. "What is the future in Viet Nam? I think it can only get better. From what I see, it is already getting better."

Fernando Del Mundo

The international community finances vocational centers under a reintegration program for returnees.

PHOTO: UNHCR / P. HERZIG

THE SISOPHON EXPRESS

All aboard for a bright new dawn

The train rattles through the Cambodian darkness. In carriage No. 2, 31 children are sleeping on wooden seats, in hammocks and all over the floor — small bundles of blanketed humanity. On the roof are five armed Dutch soldiers serving with UNTAC, the U.N. Transitional Authority in Cambodia, making sure that the children and some 1,600 other returning Cambodians get home safely.

The train, the Sisophon Express, travelling between Sisophon, in the northwest of Cambodia just inside the Thai border, and Phnom Penh, was probably a 5th class vehicle when it was new. But it does excellent service still in transporting thousands of refugees home to Cambodia under UNHCR auspices in time for elections scheduled for May 1993.

When the children wake up, all those under 11 who were born in refugee camps will see Cambodia for the first time. That afternoon, the train will arrive in Phnom Penh, their new home. There, UNHCR, with help from the Australian refugee organization AUSTCARE, has built a new orphanage to house them. The group makes up one large extended family, known as Krousar Thmey — or "New Family" in Khmer.

They became a family in the Site 2 refugee camp on the Thai-Cambodian border. The largest of the camps, it housed 190,000 men, women and children at its peak, sometimes for more than 10 years.

This youngest generation of Cambodians, born in exile as refugees, deserves special assistance from the international community in making the journey home under UNHCR auspices to start their lives as Cambodian citizens. They are the children of the Pol Pot generation, those who lost their lives or their way during Cambodia's dark times. UNHCR estimates that probably 30 percent of the Krousar Thmey children, aged between 3 and 16, are orphans in the true sense of the word. The others were abandoned, or lost to their relatives as families broke down and scattered during the years of conflict. Others were handed from family to family, some sold into prostitution and others recruited by armies.

Though each of their stories is unique, Rin and Roeun, two of the children on the train, tell you a lot about this "family." They are brothers aged 13 and 6, though small for their age. Two years ago they lived in Site 2 with their parents and a baby sister. The children's recounting of painful, half-understood events is all that we have to go on, so the details are vague but the results undeniable.

Their father left with another woman. Their mother had a mental breakdown and was taken away for care. The baby sister had been "given away" to another family. At 4 and 11, the little boys found themselves alone. Rin remembers looking for food for his brother. After some days, the neighbors, worried about the boys, pooled together and rented a taxi bicycle, put the two children on it and sent them to an orphanage run by a man they'd heard about called Sinath. There, they were taken in. It's Krousar Thmey's commitment to try where possible to reunite families or to help them to stay together. They have since managed to locate the baby sister back in Cambodia, where she had repatriated with her adoptive family. They will try to keep the children in touch with one another.

It's easy to blame parents for the fate of their children. But the reality of refugee camps, no matter how well serviced, is that it is impossible to live a "normal" life there: men can't support their families, women are often traumatized by the violence which characterizes people in a state of confinement and limbo. No one is unscarred. Traditions and family life inevitably break down. Sometimes under acute pressure, parents lose sight of their children. Unnurtured themselves, they are unable to nurture. ▶

EDITOR'S NOTE: *A one-hour television documentary on the children's journey to Cambodia, titled "Home," was made by an Australian film team. To be narrated by UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador Jack Thompson, it will be internationally distributed and available through UNHCR in June.*

Many of Sinath's children don't remember, or don't want to remember, life before Krousar Thmey, before meeting Ouch Sinath, the founder of the organization. Sinath is a gentle man in his thirties, himself a Cambodian refugee and survivor who found his way to Site 2 after losing contact with his wife and baby on the way. In the camp he was trained as a medic by *Médecins Sans Frontières*. His medical background, a rapport with children and a sense of responsibility to his community made him a natural dropping off point for street kids picked up by the authorities. The kids lived on the streets of the refugee camp and in the market place, surviving on their wits and what they could steal. Sinath's house, once again shared with his wife and three children who had managed to find one another, gradually turned from an emergency shelter into an orphanage and then into a Cambodian non-governmental organization set up to administer and to fund the care of the children. Krousar Thmey came into being as an official entity in 1991, its symbol the butterfly.

Since that time the children who arrived at Sinath's door hungry, unwashed and frightened have come back from lives of neglect and fear. They are now clean, smiling and healthy, largely due to the principal treat of the day — soya milk, made from beans ground by the children every morning in a giant stone mill. In the center, street children who had never been to school have learned to read and write. They've been taught what it means to be a Cambodian — the dance, music and festivals of their country. They've been learning skills that will give them a livelihood. And they do feel like a family — a very large family.

Sinath hasn't been able to do it alone. A gifted and caring young Frenchman, Benoit Duchateau-Arminjon — simply known as Benito to the children — has given up his accountant's job in Bangkok to raise money for Krousar Thmey's survival. He is now a much loved member of the family as well.

In the months preceding their journey, the children could only practice packing so many times, so Sinath also spent time training them to play traditional Cambodian music on drums they'd been given to repair, and to sing songs he'd been taught as a boy. One song — courtesy of Benito — sounds suspiciously like "She'll Be Coming Round the Mountain" in French.

The children who arrived at Sinath's door hungry, unwashed and frightened have come back from lives of neglect and fear.

After a long night on the train — as noisy as a wood-burning steam engine on an ancient, neglected line can be — small heads began to pop out of blankets. The laughter of village children chasing after the train floated past in the pre-dawn darkness.

As the train wound its way through the Cambodian countryside toward

Thousands of Cambodian children were born in the Thai border camps and got their first real look at their homeland from the windows of the Sisophon Express. Although returning to a fragile peace the children can at last look forward to a life beyond the cramped confines of a refugee camp.

PHOTO : UNHCR / A. ROULET

Phnom Penh, the children sang, told stories and stared at the homeland many of them had never seen. Judging by the empty fields and the red warning signs, much of the land is still mined.

True, the children were coming home to a fragile peace, at least in some areas of the country. But of all the returnees — and so far UNHCR has helped 300,000 people return to Cambodia — these children knew above all what life after the refugee camp, their only home to date, would offer. They hungered for the freedom to walk as far as they wanted in any direction without encountering a barbed wire fence; for chance at an education and a job; for a role in rebuilding their country.

The new Krousar Thmey orphanage is a simple brick villa, whitewashed and welcoming among the banana plantations of Tak Meo on the outskirts of Phnom Penh. After Site 2, it looks overwhelmingly green. There are flowers, farm animals, a pond. Pigs, ducks and a garden were being purchased.

Thirty-one bamboo sleeping platforms were in place. Special provisions were being made in the building for Mul Bun Han, a young blind amputee without relatives who was adopted by this family as they repatriated. There is a school room and shady verandahs for games. All was spotless and newly finished, waiting for the children.

They arrived singing in the back of the white CARE truck. Those who saw them come, including their new neighbors, wept at their sheer joy. They leaped from the truck and began unloading the possessions of their young lives — a box of clothes each, musical instruments, books, dominoes, and the 6-year-old Krousar Thmey pet chicken which had also safely repatriated.

In days to come, Sinath would introduce them to their homeland — to the bustling markets of Phnom Penh, to the graceful temples and the slow-moving river. Everything they see, Sinath said, amazes them — especially the traffic. But they're children who have seen many things which most of us are spared. They adapt quickly. The biggest change is that they are no longer refugees. They are children of Cambodia.

ROBYN GROVES

(Last of two parts)

For the 20th century as a whole to date, people who moved to another country as a result of persecution, internal violence, or international war, vastly outnumbered migrants driven mainly by economic necessity and opportunities. One cause is the breakdown of the remaining empires, both continental and colonial, and their replacement by a plethora of new states. Taking place in culturally very heterogeneous regions, state-formation stimulated a proliferation of religous, racial, and ethnic conflicts, some of which produced refugees. Another cause was the onset of explosive social tensions among the remaining agrarian societies founded on extreme inequality. Refugees were generated by confrontations between various *ancien régimes* and revolutionary challengers, successful revolutions, as well as brutal authoritarian régimes institut-

International migrants and refugees in historical perspective

ed to prevent revolutions. All these conflicts were often exacerbated by direct or indirect intervention of outside powers with an interest in the outcome, and tended to unleash greater violence than before because of the availability of firepower to the antagonists.

In the first half of the century, the refugees originated mostly in Europe. In the 1930s, with the onset of the depression and mounting international tensions, the gates were everywhere shut even tighter, making it almost impossible for the persecuted to find a haven. The inability to expel the Jews from Europe contributed to the Nazi's decision to undertake instead their mass murder. The Nazis also forcibly relocated very large numbers of workers throughout occupied Europe. Huge populations were further uprooted at the end of the war, including this time Germans who had previously migrated to eastern Europe, as well as masses of people fleeing the advancing Russian armies, the imposition of Polish and Soviet control over the eastern parts of Germany, or the establishment of Soviet-dominated régimes. Most of these were relocated in West Germany, the United States and Canada.

After World War II, most of the industrial countries resumed the use of temporary foreign workers as a partial solution to two perennial problems; inducing growth while minimizing inflationary pressure from wages, and providing a cushion against conjunctural fluctuations in the level of employment. Although arrangements varied considerably, they brought about remarkably similar results. As the post-war boom expanded, the domain of recruitment as well as of self-propelled migration widened to encompass hitherto untapped countries of the developing world, now experiencing rapid demographic growth and subject to the dynamics of the international economy. Moreover, although the workers were meant to be temporary, and often thought of themselves in the same way, their comings and goings produced substantial settlement. This resulted everywhere in a marked increase in the cultural and ethnic heterogeneity of the receiving countries.

Although with regard to temporary workers Britain continued to rely mostly on Ireland, for reasons of foreign policy the post-war Labor government granted freedom of entry to citizens of the new Commonwealth countries; this fostered a substantial migration from South Asia and the West Indies in the 1950s, which stimulated the precocious emergence of anti-immigration movements and the imposition of restrictive policies. In the post-war decades the United States also received an increasing number of legally qualified permanent immigrants from Latin American and Caribbean countries. Elimination of the discriminatory "national origins" quota system in 1965 had the unanticipated effect of shifting the sources of immigration from Europe to Asia and to a lesser extent Africa. By providing more generously for family reunion, the reforms also fostered an unexpected escalation in the number of legal entries, reaching half a million a year in the 1980s, plus another 100,000 refugees. Similar developments also took place in Canada and Australia.

In the 1970s, mounting pressures from conservative segments of the citizenry as well as the oil crisis and ensuing economic difficulties prompted the governments of the industrial countries to undertake a drastic re-evaluation of ongoing immigration. Most European states immediately froze the attribution or renewal of labor permits; and since residence was usually contingent upon work, this was expected to bring about the gradual departure of most of the foreign workers. But in the face of even more catastrophic economic conditions in the countries of origin, most of them did not want to go home, and their forced removal proved impossible for political reasons. Subsequently, concern over the presence of substantial concentrations of non-European young adult males, as well as the urg- ▶

▶ ings of the workers themselves with support of humanitarian groups, prompted the receivers to allow the workers to bring in their families. Thus, paradoxically, in the late 1970s the foreign population increased rather than decreased; and as families reformed, with more children brought up in Europe or even born there, a process of *de facto* immigration got under way. In the United States, action to tighten the back door was delayed by the complexities of the decentralized political process, but finally completed in 1986. But there also, those already in place were allowed to stay. Foreign workers also came into wide use in the developing world, notably oil producers, as well as some successful agricultural exporters and newly industrializing countries. However, the onset of hard times usually prompted their brutal expulsion.

In the early post-war period, the western countries undertook to atone for recent tragedies by providing international mechanisms for protecting and assisting refugees. Although these were initially designed to deal only with the sequels of past persecution, subsequently most western states also welcomed people escaping from European countries under communist rule. But except for Germany until 1960 and Hungary in 1956, the numbers were quite small. Meanwhile, however, the processes that had generated refugees in Europe for many centuries began to engulf other parts of the world, starting with the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947 and of Palestine the following year. There were also massive displacements from continental China to Taiwan, from North to South Korea, and from North to South Viet Nam. Most of the refugees from this period were relatively quickly resettled within the Third World itself, with the notable exception of the Palestinians. However, in the 1960s the wars of national liberation in southern Africa as well as internal crises among the continent's new states also began to generate large-scale displacements, and in the course of the following decade, the number of internationally displaced persons in need of assistance worldwide escalated from an annual level of about 5 million to some 15 million. This crisis was attributable mostly to an exacerbation of internal conflicts by direct or indirect intervention of the superpowers, resulting in the expansion of these conflicts in both time and space.

Most of the Third World's new refugees continued to remain in their region of origin, but now tended to be confined in camps where they had little or no opportunity to fend for themselves, and were therefore dependent on intermittent assistance from international agencies. A very small number, mostly Indochinese, were invited to resettle in western countries. Some others ventured farther afield and came knocking at the door of the rich just as hard times set in. Concurrently, the proliferation of barriers against immigration also prompted some migrants to try their luck by filling an asylum claim. Existing mechanisms for processing applications were rapidly overwhelmed, and the appearance of large numbers of questionable refugees further fueled xenophobic fires. This led to a tightening of procedures, with deleterious consequences for some genuine refugees.

Existing mechanisms for processing applications were rapidly overwhelmed, and large numbers of questionable refugees further fueled xenophobic fires.

The sudden and unanticipated political liberalization of the Warsaw Pact countries from the mid-1980s onward prompted the elimination of most barriers to emigration. Concurrently, economic reorganization exposed hundreds of millions to the dynamics of market forces, while the removal or collapse of some of the region's authoritarian structures allowed latent social forces to manifest themselves. In the absence of appropriate institutions for settling political confrontations, such forces began to produce explosive conflicts. Contributing to a further enlargement of the world-wide pool of potential migrants and refugees, these events further exacerbated the concerns of potential receivers, particularly in the continguous European region. Somewhat similar developments also began taking place in the relevant parts of Asia and elsewhere in the developing world.

The abrupt disappearance of restrictions on exit, which constituted a major feature of the international migration régime, has created an unprecedented situation, whereby the world-wide stream is regulated exclusively by the immigration policies of the potential receivers. The ensuing pressure at their gates starkly reveals the crucial function of the wall they erected with regard to the maintenance of global inequality, but also in preserving democratic conditions among the privileged few. It is difficult to tell whether current developments constitute merely another episode in the turbulent history of the third epoch, or the dawn of a yet more problematic one, in which the matter of international population movements will arise as a major issue of contention between the haves and the have-nots.

ARISTIDE R. ZOLBERG
New School for Social Research, New York

Mechanics maintaining one of the hundreds of trucks used by GTZ, UNHCR and the government of Ethiopia in the Transport Operation for Refugees.

PHOTO: UNHCR / A. HOLLMANN

Trucking aid, building homes

The operation to bring relief assistance to the Horn of Africa begins at the ports of Djibouti and Aseb in Ethiopia. There, the 250 trucks of the "Transport Operation for Refugees" (TOR) set out for Gambela or Mizan in the west of Ethiopia, or Dolo in the south.

The supplies are taken to interim depots where they are reloaded on all-wheel-drive vehicles and brought to target destinations along dirt tracks.

Since 1989, over 20 million food units and other supplies have been delivered each month to areas where Somali and Sudanese refugees and Ethiopian returnees have been receiving aid.

TOR is a joint undertaking of UNHCR, the government of Ethiopia and the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) GmbH (German Agency for Technical Cooperation), a general contractor of the German government. The project performs logistical tasks, is responsible for transport operations and management, and ensures that the transport fleet is in good working order.

Some 670 Ethiopian staff in the 12 regional offices deal with workshops, goods depots and filling stations. The infrastructure covers virtually the entire western, eastern and southern parts of the country.

TOR has now become the second largest nongovernmental transport operation for aid supplies in Ethiopia. GTZ's job is more than just transporting goods. To be able to do that, it has to overcome such problems as supply bottlenecks, which require considerable logistics and management input; lack of depots and communications facilities; impassable roads; and inaccurate information about stocks.

These activities have allowed GTZ to branch out to other undertakings. For example, in the former Yugoslavia, GTZ is involved in a different task. As a general contractor of the German government, GTZ is cooperating closely with UNHCR and Croatian agencies in a German program to provide winter shelter for some 20,000 people.

Under the program, prefabricated dwellings are being erected in refugee villages outside the towns of Karlovac, Cepin and Rocovci to house about 8,000 people. At a variety of other locations, empty buildings — factories, barracks, sport facilities — are being rehabilitated to house around 12,000 people.

Although this project focuses primarily on the urgently needed emergency aid, it also aims at creating the basis for reconstruction and reintegration of the displaced persons and refugees. The prefabricated buildings may only constitute a temporary solution, but the associated infrastructure — site development, water, power, sanitation, paths - will be of lasting value to the Croatians.

Although providing humanitarian, refugee and emergency aid is not the domain of the GTZ, the agency has become increasingly active in these fields in recent years. This is because GTZ is often called upon to do something more than what is needed to be able to perform its assigned task.

Thanks to existing outside structures, project administration services, and close contacts with embassies, the GTZ has been able to implement emergency measures swiftly. An extensive information network and available experts have enabled GTZ to operate in a large number of sectors and countries. By linking classical emergency aid criteria with sustainable development goals, the GTZ is responding to the growing call to combine emergency aid with development cooperation, a solution perhaps to one of the major dilemmas in emergency aid to date.

Dr. Johannes Seifen
Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) GmbH

A DAY IN THE LIFE

Let the sun shine in

SARAJEVO - I knew this was a war of fear and loathing. But nothing I had read, no pictures I had seen, no stories I had heard prepared me for my first glimpse of Sarajevo. The sheer physical destruction of that once-beautiful city is enough to break a heart. Five minutes there convinced me I'd stepped inside somebody else's bad dream.

I was walking with my companions through Old Town, or what's left of it. I was wearing a flak jacket and carrying a camera, looking very much the foreigner, when an old man approached me. He gestured at the devastated city and said, "Sarajevo. Catastroph-ah!" Then he flung his hands in despair and walked away. He was right.

Everywhere I turned there were images of war: the barbed wire and sandbags, armored personnel carriers, shattered windows, collapsed storefronts, high-rise buildings with giant bites taken out of their sides — and etched into the pavement of every roadway, the swirls created by exploding mortar shells.

I saw people chopping down trees which line the city streets — to gather desperately needed wood for cooking and heating. They are forced to denude their town of not only beauty but precious cover from sniper fire.

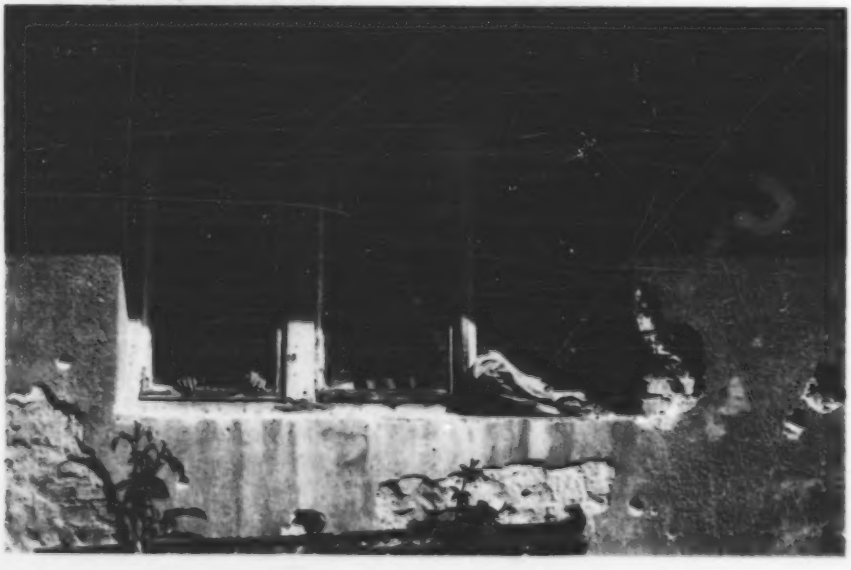
But the devastation is not my personal story of Sarajevo. Fear and loathing are only part of it.

I traveled around the city and talked to its citizens. Their bravery, courage and sense of defiance eased my own despair and gave me hope. I discovered that all the mortar shells, artillery attacks and sniper fire were powerless to crush the spirit of the Sarajevans. For what I experienced there was actually uplifting. I saw the human spirit soar.

My companions and I visited the city's daily newspaper. "Oslobodenja" (which means "Liberation") had not missed printing an issue since the siege began. The paper's building has been targeted for destruction. Only part of it remains. Nonetheless, the staff carries on, without pay, while dodging daily sniper bullets fired into their offices. They are inspired by the knowledge that their fellow citizens depend on them as a precious link to the outside world.

Next stop was the local radio station, barely operating in its own partially bombed-out communications building. The staff here also presses on with dignity. They manage to transmit a signal which can be picked up on shortwave. After a tour and a chat, the station manager watched me struggle back into my flak jacket. I felt embarrassed that I had one and she didn't. At the door, I shook the hand of the young man who had been our host. In that moment, I caught a glimpse of the employee ID badge hanging from a chain around his neck. The picture showed a face that was plump, round and healthy-looking. That was the person he was before the siege, not

Editor's note: *As part of an ongoing effort to publicize the plight of the world's 18 million refugees, UNHCR recently took a group of Hollywood film writers, actors and directors to the Horn of Africa and to the former Yugoslavia. Here are the impressions of two members — Barbara Francis, of UNHCR's Washington, D.C. office, who led the group and describes a day in Sarajevo, and actor Mike Farrell, who writes about his experiences along the Kenya-Somalia border.*



Mortar shells, artillery attacks and sniper fire cannot crush the spirit of Sarajevans.
PHOTO: UNHCR / E. DAGNINO

the thin, pale and gaunt person he is now.

Finally, we saw the ultimate in defiance. We attended a Broadway show. In fact, it's a one-hour adaptation of the anti-war musical "Hair". Every day at noon, free of charge, standing room only. And the performance brings down the house. The theater group operates off a very weak generator. So they operate one day at a time.

The psychedelic set and the electric guitars momentarily drown out the war. And so do the beautiful lyrics. "Good morning, starshine, the Earth says hello." When the cast cries out to "let the sun shine, let the sunshine in," the audience can't help but chime in. Then the actors bring members of the audience up on stage to sing and dance along to the show's rousing climax.

A little boy about 10 years old had been standing next to me watching the performance. Vladimir is the son of one of the actors. He asked me to join him onstage. So up I went, flak jacket and all, to dance and sing the praises of peace, love, freedom, happiness. The whole house was in a state of utter euphoria. And for that moment in time, in that place, I was deliriously happy.

Then the few weak house lights came on, the music died down and Vladimir and I — instant best friends — hugged each other. He gave me a little gift to remember him by, a broken silver keychain he produced from his pocket. We posed to have our picture taken together.

A woman came up behind me and tapped me on the shoulder. I turned around to hear her say "You're lucky." I asked her why. "Because you get to leave here," she said. And then I remembered where i was and what this was and why I was here. I took her hand and said that we — my companions and I — would not let the world forget them.

With the guitar music still ringing in my ears, I stepped outside into the sunshine. And I prayed for the day when peace and love replace fear and loathing in the place where my friend Vladimir lives.

BARBARA FRANCIS

The children are heartbreaking. PHOTO: UNHCR / B. PRESS

A little respect

MANDERA CAMP, KENYA - First light, and what a glorious light it is. The African predawn is magnificent. An orange and gold sky, dotted with brilliant white clouds. The purple landscape stretches off toward a horizon broken only by the occasional acacia tree. And, off in the distance, the rolling hills of Somalia.

We drive out through Mandera town and across the Somali border into Bulla Hawa. It is a typical Third World border town; busy market place, much evidence of destruction, incredible squalor. We have to negotiate around huge pools of water left by the recent rains. The soil, very much composed of clay, doesn't absorb the water very well.

Poverty is evident here, as is destruction from the war and the same kind of cannibalization we saw in Baidoa. Structures are ripped apart for building materials and/or firewood. Also visible are the automatic weapons atop pickup trucks and jeeps, or in people's hands.

The aim of UNHCR's Cross-Border Operation is to jump-start a society and to renew an economy.

We stop at the local office of Trocaire (an Irish NGO and implementing partner in UNHCR's operation) to pick up our interpreters. The one who rides with us is a boy of perhaps 13 named Mohammed. A very bright kid. We cruise through the town eyeing the awful destruction. Jack Myer (UNHCR's field officer at Mandera) points out areas in which various programs are centered. UNHCR is providing, for instance, material to rebuild the local school, which was totally gutted in the war. ▶

▶ Once on the road, we stop at a camp for displaced persons. Trocaire has set up a feeding center for these people and again we see cases of dire need. These are people who, depending upon whom you listen to, either didn't want to go to Mandera camp, couldn't make it, or chose in some organized political way to stop here and learn "self-sufficiency." This last remark from a man we meet, a self-described intellectual, member of the Somali Intellectual Association.

He says they're stopping the flow of refugees to Mandera camp and are trying to help people here so they won't go there and become dependent. They don't want to be "spoon-fed."

The Trocaire nurses are struggling to deal with the number of severely malnourished people here. Again, skeletal forms are painful to look upon. The children are heart-breaking. Skin stretched over bones. Too weak, in many cases, to cry.

Across the road from the feeding center, tukuls, or huts, are set up in haphazard fashion and extend out in a semi-circle for quite a distance. I don't know how to even estimate the numbers involved, but a prodigious amount of work will have to be done to meet the need and this small staff, with its feeding center, seems ill-equipped (except in spirit) to do the job.

Again, we move on, a four-car caravan. Out here the dusty roads split the scrub brush and the country looks very bleak and inhospitable.

After about an hour's drive, we pull into the village of Melkahari. Before the war, it was a thriving community of 6,000. Now it is a devastated ghost town. But there is a happy throng gathered around a truck, assisting in the unloading of scores of sacks of flour provided by UNHCR.

UNHCR and Trocaire have joined forces here to try to rehabilitate this village. One thousand people from Mandera camp have agreed to come back here with the promise of food supply for six months, and provision of machinery and materials to allow them to set up farming, schooling and a health care clinic. It is a happy gathering, almost a carnival atmosphere, and very nice to see after the camp we just left.

A heart-tugging sight is to see women marking out the circles for the tukuls they will erect; digging the holes for the framing sticks out of the hard earth. What guts.

Next we go down to the river where we're shown a farm that has been in operation for some months. UNHCR sponsored a pump to pull up water for irrigation and the results are spectacular. There are quite few acres of thriving crops here and the hope is that, if the war doesn't come back, this will be replicated throughout the area. We're shown around here by a young Irish pair who seem to be completely undaunted by the task ahead.

Once back in Bulla Hawa, we go to an area where a group of disabled people await us. Amputees, some crippled by disease, a few apparently mentally retarded. They are literally "the poorest of the poor." (The phrase "Jesus wept" comes to mind). These people have a request to make of UNHCR. They want to be included in some sort of work program by which they can use the talents and abilities they have to earn some money and improve their lot. (One simply wants to sit down and cry).

Jack, who had worked in Iraqi Kurdistan before this, squats down to talk in Arabic to the leader, who has pads on his hands and knees to get around as he can't use his lower legs. They talk, seem to argue, to bargain, for quite a while. Jack tells us that he has a program for their peers in the camp, but it is hard to set one up here. Finally, they come to some agreement. As we leave, Jack says, "All they want is a little respect."

Jack is a hard one to figure. Strong personality, very assertive, he has a tendency to see things as a contest... On the other hand, to see him hunkered down with the spokesperson for this group of disabled people, bargaining respectfully and trying to find a way to work things out which will give them "a little respect" is tremendously impressive.

Mike Farrell

Just add water and the results are spectacular.

PHOTO : UNHCR / B. FRANCIS

LETTERS

There are no Rohingyas

I refer to your article, Bangladesh: In the Eye of the Storm (Vol. 89, May 1992). You quoted the "refugees" who alleged that the "government of Myanmar, a largely Buddhist country, mounted a campaign of persecution against the Rohingya Muslim population in Arakan province." You also quoted a statement said to be made by the regional director for Asia and Oceania of the UNHCR:

"The refugees are not pouring into Bangladesh due to fear of persecution, but only after being persecuted. The world will be in chaotic situation if all countries start expelling minorities who have lived there for generations."

To say the least, this is an outrageous statement coming from one who is holding a responsible post in an international organization associated with member states of the United Nations.

The Union of Myanmar is made up of eight major national races from a common Mongoloid stock which can be subdivided into 135 national racial groups. Among these races are Rakhines who live in the Rakhine State.

The so-called "Rohingyas" never belonged to any of these races or racial groups. The word "Rohingya" is an invention of certain insurgent groups...

It is not true that people who profess the Islamic faith form the majority of the population of Rakhine. According to the Myanmar Immigration and Manpower Department, the population of Rakhine in June 1991 was 2,256,021, of which 693,459 were Bengalis. The Muslims are concentrated in the townships of Buthidaung and Maungdaw, which are adjacent to Bangladesh. Indigenous Rakhines are in the majority in the rest of 15 townships of Rakhine State.

You stated that Arakan was once an independent kingdom founded by Arab and Moorish merchants in the 7th century. Arab and Moorish merchants might have visited and passed through Rakhine in the 7th century. But certainly by no stretch of the imagination could you assert that they founded Arakan.

You mentioned the 220,000 Myanmar residents who crossed over to Bangladesh in 1978. This mass movement was simply people moving back where they originally came from upon scrutiny of proper papers by the immigration authorities. In the spirit of friendship and good neighborliness, the Myanmar government accepted back 186,968 persons.

To accuse the Myanmar government of persecution against the Muslim population and the Myanmar Armed Forces of murder and rape against the inhabitants in the Rakhine State is a total travesty...

YIN YIN MYINT
Second Secretary
Permanent Mission of Myanmar,
Geneva

Balanced, moving

Having read issue No. 91 of *Refugees*, I feel moved to comment on its most impressive quality. *Refugees* provides an invaluable, balanced and moving — sometimes saddening yet invariably hopeful — forum for the cause of those unfortunate enough to be refugees.

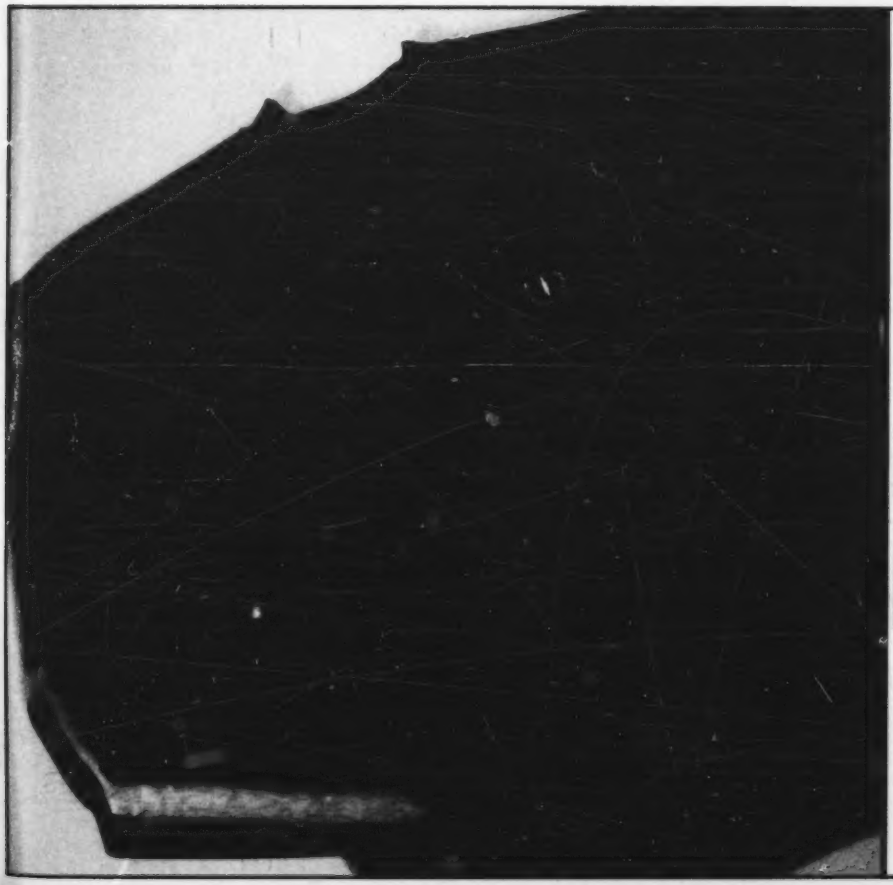
G. MCMILLAN
Durham, England

Grotesque unreality

I enjoy reading your magazine because it is like reading Kafka. It has the same air of grotesque unreality. The refugees simply exist without reason. Who causes their misery? Who creates the conditions that makes them flee their homes? One hears from other sources of dictators who deliberately wage war against, or starve their populations. Are they the cause? Why do they remain nameless and unblamed?

One could almost begin to suspect that the existence of your organization has become more important than solving the refugee crisis.

A.J. DOWNING
Geneva



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Every year, thousands of babies are born with a serious handicap.

She looks perfectly normal. But she was born a refugee – and that's serious. Many thousands of children grow up knowing no other life. They are innocent victims of persecution and violence.

UNHCR is there to help refugee children.

Your attitude can be the difference between hope for their future and despair.

We need <u>your</u> help to help refugees.

UNHCR ACTION
P.O. Box 2500 CH - 1211 Geneva 2 Switzerland

UNHCR
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees